

# Idyls and Sketches

---

Sister M. Blanche



Class PS 3525.

Book A 775 I3

Copyright No. 1916

**COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.**

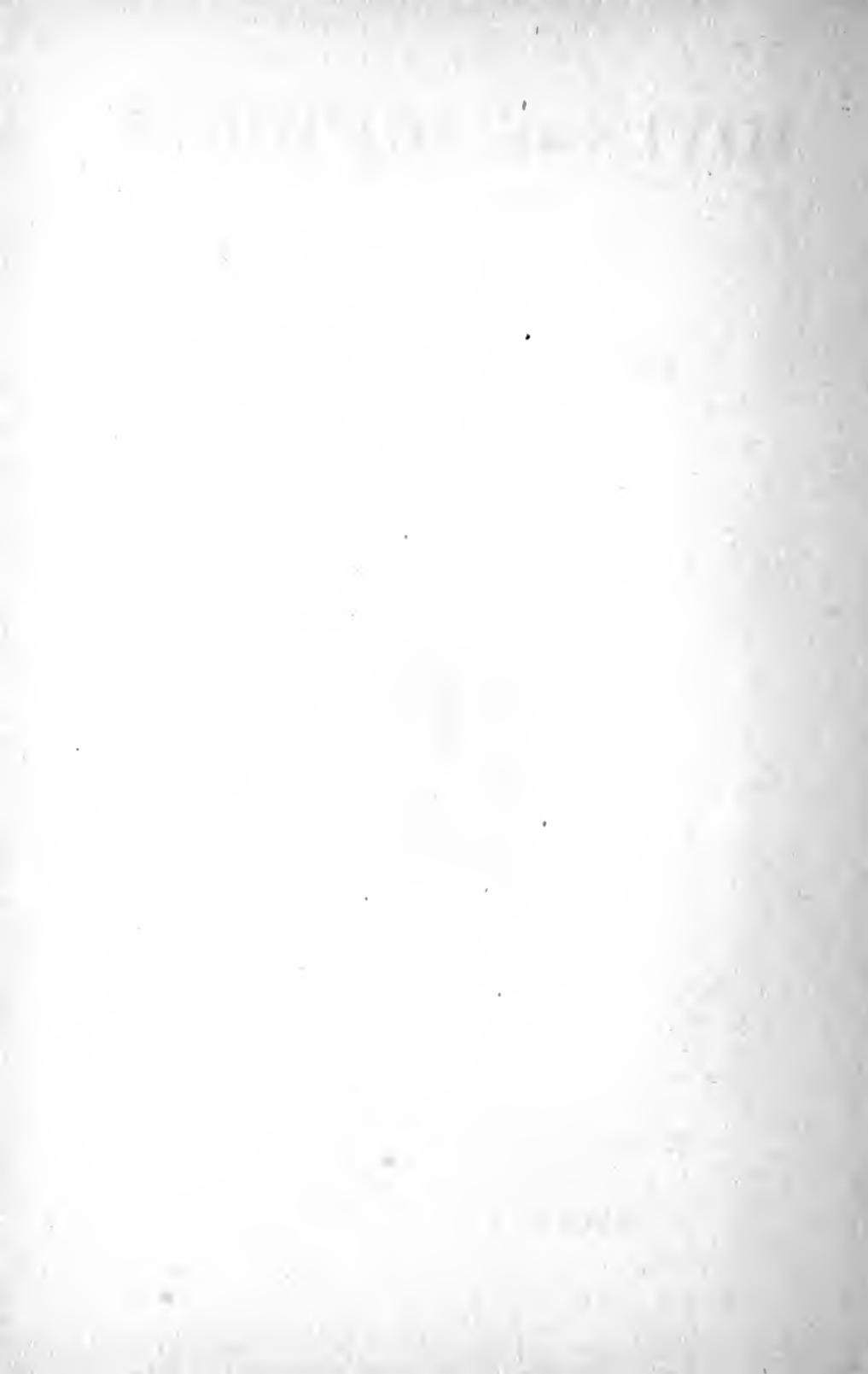








## **IDYLS AND SKETCHES**



Mary Blanche, Sister, originally Elizabeth King

# IDYLS and SKETCHES

BY

SISTER M. BLANCHE

OF THE SISTERS OF THE HOLY CROSS

*AUTHOR OF "POEMS"*



P. J. KENEDY & SONS

PRINTERS TO THE HOLY APOSTOLIC SEE

44 BARCLAY STREET, NEW YORK

PS3525  
A775 I3  
1916

COPYRIGHT, 1916,  
ST. MARY'S ACADEMY  
NOTRE DAME, ST. JOSEPH'S COUNTY, INDIANA

APR 29 1916

©CL.A 427907

26.1.

TO THE DEAR MEMORY OF  
SISTER M. BERTHA  
OF THE SISTERS OF THE HOLY CROSS—  
THE NOBLE, THE UNSELFISH, THE DEVOTED



## CONTENTS

	PAGE
IN RED AND GOLD . . . . .	11
WINTER MOONLIGHT . . . . .	19
A STUDY IN GRAY . . . . .	25
IN APRIL . . . . .	31
THE OUT-DOOR WORLD . . . . .	37
A SUMMER SIESTA . . . . .	43
A FEW BIRD NOTES . . . . .	51
BIRDS IN THE BUSH . . . . .	59
A BUNCH OF WILD FLOWERS . . . . .	69
FLOWER-LORE . . . . .	79
CONCERNING COLOR . . . . .	89
GEMS OF PUREST RAY—I . . . . .	97
GEMS OF PUREST RAY—II . . . . .	105
BRANDS OF HUMOR . . . . .	115
TABLE TALK . . . . .	123
THE LETTER IS THE MAN . . . . .	131
CHARACTER REQUISITES . . . . .	137
BE NATURAL . . . . .	143
SPRINGS OF EMOTION . . . . .	149

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
HOROSCOPES VERSUS TELESCOPES . . . . .	155
WHEN ALCHEMY WAS KING . . . . .	163
CELESTIAL MESSENGERS . . . . .	171
MOTHER EARTH . . . . .	179
PICTURES IN GLASS . . . . .	185
THE HUMORIST OF SUNNYSIDE . . . . .	193
THE FIRESIDE BARD . . . . .	201
SWALLOW FLIGHTS OF SONG . . . . .	207
A GREAT CATHOLIC POET . . . . .	217

**IN RED AND GOLD**



## IDYLS AND SKETCHES IN RED AND GOLD

**D**O you remember that day in August, when idly glancing upward at the waving tree-tops, you descried a tiny red leaf? That was the first application of nature's small taper to the foliage, which slowly catching fire, has at length burst into this October blaze of color.

To attempt to translate into words the thousand subtle shades caught in the meshes of the autumnal foliage is to court defeat, though it may be said that in the congress of colors, crimson and gold lord it over the others. Every tree has hung its most gorgeous banner upon its framework of limbs and branches, and the earth itself seems arched over by a hollow hemisphere of thinnest turquoise.

Here is a maple which yesterday stood conspicuous and green in the midst of its bright-hued neighbors, as if steadily refusing to change its color, but under the light kiss of last night's frost,

it has blushed a bright crimson. There, a tree clad in sober russet, nestles its leafage against a neighbor gorgeous in scarlet and amber. Another, to whose foliage belongs the epithet plum-color, sways over the river, seemingly enamored of the reflection visible in the liquid mirror below. Everywhere is a wealth of beauty and a splendor more than oriental!

This is a day steeped in fall sunshine. Sweetly seductive, it coaxes the student from his desk, bidding him "go forth under the open sky and list to nature's teachings." A passing cloud hides the sun for a moment and the river shows gray and wrinkled. But stay! Has some gigantic mirror been shattered and the fragments given to the current? No, it is only the witchery of the sunlight gleaming on the surface of the water. Small wonder that the river breaks into dimples and sunny smiles, for are not the stately trees, resplendent in autumnal regalia, mounting guard over it?

Here and there, a belated plumelet of golden-rod bends in the breeze, while purple asters sprinkle the low undergrowth with soft color. In the thickets flaunt the rich crimson leaves of the sumach with its wine-red drupes, the latter a comfort to the eye, though to the palate not an unmixed pleasure.

The birds just on the eve of taking wing, now betray their presence by a swift darting in and out among the branches, and a few twittering notes sung, perhaps, just to keep their voices in tune. Again, something that sounds ominously like a "family jar" comes from yonder clump of trees. Indeed there is much commotion in birddom just now, as if for the annual exodus the family wardrobe and paraphernalia were being made ready for transference to Southland.

Let us take a look at the neighboring ravine arrayed in all its autumn finery. Its bosky coverts in mid-summer seem wrapped in sylvan mystery. Not so long ago you could not screw your courage to the sticking place, in order to penetrate its tangled paths and shadowy recesses. But to-day there is a perceptible thinning of the red and gold tapestry, and you easily pluck out the heart of its mystery, which was, after all, an open secret.

Here is a fallen tree-trunk, moss-grown and lichen-crusted. The woodbine's leaflets, like so many tongues of flame, flutter along its gray length, giving it a beauty it could not boast even when it lifted its green top to the skies. Here, too, hanging in cylindrical racemes, grows the fruit which bears the prosaic name, pokeberry. The truant lad, fleeing from irksome school tasks,

early learns its whereabouts and distils from its juicy globes the ruby fluid which with boyish pride he labels “red ink.”

Clambering out of the ravine where the ascent is easiest, we follow a path that winds close to the edge of a newly-plowed field, and are again brought face to face with the swift-flowing river. Here the maples begin to reveal their anatomy. Under the winds’ rude buffetings, they have cast off much of their summer vesture. There it lies, doing duty now as a carpet, and soon to be resolved into its original elements.

But the stately oaks—what of them? Like veterans tried and true they stand, wrapping their splendid drapery about them, ready to fight valiantly with wind and storm. If the oak leaf, glossy and green, is a thing of beauty when bathed in light, what can be said when autumn has waved her magic wand above it? Its deep lobes and graceful curves have taken unto themselves a new charm, and when sunlight filters through the swaying mass of leaves, the brown, the scarlet, the rich purple that dye their tissue, as to color effect place at a discount the best product of oriental looms.

Looking at the flaming maples and the glowing oaks, Thoreau called them the true fall roses.

The surrounding pines were to him the green calyx whence arose the myriad small petals fluttering in the breeze. And in truth the fancy is not inapt. Standing upon some height commanding a view of the distant woodlands, the effect is not unlike that of an immense flower garden, terrace above terrace, the colors blended and toned down by distance—like those of an old painting mellowed and softened by time. But day declines, and the trees away off at the horizon's edge are already wrapping themselves in gauzy veils of blue and hiding from our view autumn's glorious panorama painted in red and gold.



## **WINTER MOONLIGHT**



## WINTER MOONLIGHT

THE moon had not risen and the sky, a vast flower-bell of blue sprinkled with a few yellow stars for pollen dust, hung solemn and still above the white earth. Suddenly, low down in the eastern horizon, a cloud-bank catches a glow from some hidden luminary and appears like a fragile vase lighted from within.

Brighter and brighter grows the illumination. Something mysterious is happening yonder in that eastern arc of the horizon. A red radiance now shines through the cloud-drift. It contracts to a head; it forces its way through the clouds—a ruby in a white setting—burns there for a few moments, rises higher and higher, the red glow fading to silver, and behold! the moon has risen.

Then begin the transformation scenes. Down pours the argent flood upon a world wrapped in snow. The lawn and the far fields stretch away as if covered with white velvet, glinting with the dust of a million diamonds. As the moon climbs higher the sky's blue slope, the pines, and spruces,

with something akin to grim humor, throw grotesque shadows upon the outspread white, and each many-branching maple lets fall a tracery delicate and exquisite beyond the pencil of mortal artist.

Each viewpoint presents a new picture in a new setting. The road down the avenue, under the combined forces of the snow and the heavenly alchemy of the moonlight, seems cut through low quarries of Parian marble, to right and left lying the piled-up fragments. Who shall say that the moon is not a magician? Or is it the man who is popularly said to dwell there? Be the witchery whence it may, yonder prosaic pile of brick and mortar—what with the snow and the moon's mild rays—illustrates a new and beautiful order of architecture.

The trees that in summer arch the avenue with shade, now stand like a double line of sentinels in gray garb, with soldierly erectness and dignity around the bier of winter; as I have seen a military company in gray uniforms—each man with musket in hand and motionless as a statue—drawn up round the catafalque of a Chief Magistrate.

But with the passing hours the aspect of the heavens changes. Now the sky becomes a sea whose waves are crested with cloud-foam, and the

moon, a kind of water-lily loosed from its moorings, afloat thereon. The cloud-foam surges over it and it is lost to view, but scatters anon, and there is the moonflower as if newly blossomed, drifting over the blue.

Hastening to her setting over there in the west, just above the church, lonely Venus hangs, liquid and large, another Bethlehem's star or a sanctuary lamp above the Holy of Holies. The brooding silence of a mid-winter night is over all. The gray river twists and curves between white fields. The magic moonlight has made it a mirror of steel in which the trees that fringe its brink do glass themselves—the trees “where late the sweet birds sang.”

At intervals, a light breeze rustles the few sear leaves that still cling to the oaks and a weird sound smites the ear—a sound out of harmony with this winter loveliness. One might fancy it the ghost of summer sighing for the days that are no more. The mist rising from the river floats landward, and the falling temperature weaves from it veils of the whitest, filmiest lawn, seemingly suspended from the trees.

To the south, far across the snow fields, gleam the village lights, a few looking not unlike stars just risen above the skyline. Night has come—if

beautiful, serious and sad also—an hour and a season when the home-feeling stirs most strongly in the heart of the wayfarer.

But the wayfarer, if haply he be not altogether blind to beauty, may read in this winter idyl poetry written by God's own hand. Not the passionate poetry of summer that holds the heart in thrall by its sensuous loveliness, but a majestic kind, serene, austere and noble. Gazing upon the world swathed in snow, and steeped in silvery light, the soul must needs soar on the wings of loving thought to the Poet of poets—God.

# A STUDY IN GRAY



## A STUDY IN GRAY

**N**ATURE is your true landscape painter. The mile, not the foot, is the unit measure of her canvases. Upon her palette rest colors, with their infinite variety of shades and tints, found in no mortal studio. When the summer panorama is unrolled, count, if you can, the thousand-and-one hues that blend with the ubiquitous green of the picture, or give a name to the dyes that greet the gaze when the autumnal canvas glides into view.

For weeks past the eye has been fed with the wraith-like beauty of the wintry landscape, but after a few revolutions of the earth, upon which is stretched this canvas, a picture widely different stands upon the easel. It is morning, and you look out upon the new day. The first glimpse of that colossal picture, the outer world, though in keeping with the season, is depressing. A lenten atmosphere pervades the scene. The sky that yesterday bent blue and beautiful over the white earth, to-day frowns gray and threatening, and like an

empty room, bereft of a familiar presence, seems grieving at the absence of the friendly sun.

Mother Earth, too, is in a penitential mood, and wears her garb of sackcloth—a nondescript vesture woven of last year's withered leaves and grasses—in a manner becoming a penitent of the most approved type. Across the river the dun-colored meadows stretch away toward, with here and there a gnarled tree mounting solitary guard over fields which not so long ago laughed in summer beauty.

The sullen river to-day sends back no answering gleam to the sky, but rolls lakeward its leaden tide, sentinelled by trees from which all life seems to have departed. And the feeling awakened in the onlooker? Something akin to that which would stir the heart on gazing upon the ruin of once noble architecture, from the wreck of whose beauty all glory has fled.

Higher up, where the bluff stretches into a broad lawn, the skeleton oaks and maples keep company with the brooding pines and hemlocks, whose crape-like drapery hangs limp and funereal, suggestive of flags at half-mast. And yet the note of beauty is present amid the general grayness. Observe the lovely lacework woven against the sky

by the many-branching maples with their multitudinous twigs and branchlets. Glance down at the rough tree trunks, encrusted with gray-green lichen gems, looking out from a fantastically curled setting of silver-gray. Of a truth, this is lenten loveliness.

Yonder the catalpa droops its tasseled pods, all that is left to tell us that last July those twisted limbs were hidden by bouquets of fragrant bloom. To a few oaks, some russet leaves still cling, and, as the light wind stirs them, a sound like a half-suppressed sigh startles the ear. The saucy sparrow, as if depressed by the general dulness, neglects to chirp, but flits about, his drab vest adding another shade of gray to the scene. But I forget. There *is* a dash of bright color over there, where the rose-bush holds its scarlet fruit like tiny red birds in a cage, waiting for summer to unbar the door.

Yes, the whole outdoor world is somber and sad, as if under a spell of enchantment. Nature seems in breathless expectation of the coming of some one. Who is the prince that will break the spell? The summer sun, of course, and even now there are signs and tokens that hint of his coming. Yonder, in the west, is a strip of blue "not larger

than a man's hand," but it will spread far and wide until the sky wears a turquoise tint, when the earth will throw aside her sackcloth and ashes and awake to life and loveliness.

**IN APRIL**



## IN APRIL

WHEN Spring comes up from the south, every frank true heart must needs, methinks, beat a little faster at the first glad note of the bluebird that tells of her coming. There is a mysterious sympathy of the spirit with the life awakening in the breast of earth. Whether we will or not, it seems to proclaim us her next of kin.

There is a nameless something in the air that affects us like a draught from some fabled fountain of youth and hope. Life must have showed only its seamy side to him, whose eye now is not brighter, whose heart is not lighter, and who does not listen with a smile to the bird of hope singing to his awakened soul.

April days there are, that I am persuaded have stolen from May no small fraction of her sweet seductiveness. Then the air is bland and soft and caressing. Dove-gray clouds, now and again, shot through with pale gold, move with languid grace across the sky. Or perhaps the vaporous veils

part for a moment, revealing a soft azure, as a blue-eyed lass draws aside the drapery of her window, then shyly lets it fall again.

Beauty's spell has fallen upon the earth. The brook calls me forth with a voice that is music's own. The witchery of color in sky and tree and flower beckons to me. Can I resist these alluring invitations? Not I indeed. And as I walk along the path that skirts the river's brink, I see that Spring has left signs and tokens indicative of her presence. On my right, and leaning well over the water, are the pussy willows, their silver-green stems already wearing the gray tassels to which they owe their name. A little later I know these downy pendants will fall, and the willows wrap themselves in a haze of green.

Far up on the steep incline of the river bank I see the waxen petals of the blood-root gleaming. The sun, not so long ago, forced it to let fall its leaf-cloak. There it is now a little below the flower-cup, cunningly cut in bewildering sinuses, its color a pale green, tantalizingly reminiscent of blue.

As I go further on, the spring blooms look at me with the old, familiar faces, all expressing the dominant mood of the season. They are delicate and shy; charming, with the shrinking, uncertain

charm of spring. They possess the elusive beauty that lurks in soft tones and faint colors. April sees the hepaticas out in full force, some born in the purple, others gowned in dainty blue, and a few wearing a color faintly suggestive of shell-pink. They have tossed back the grayish furry hood of the involucre that half revealed, half concealed their charms and now fairly challenge admiration.

But there are other blooms out taking the air of these April days. Starlike they gleam—the anemones—as they climb the slant of the river bluff, now with blanched petals fluttering in the breeze, now softly touched with an exquisite violet or a delicious pink. With fine scorn of things sub-lunary, old Boreas sweeps over them in mad haste. They tremble and sway and I think all is over with them. A little later I pass that way again, and am pleasantly startled at seeing them safe and sound, smiling at me from the brown mold.

Loitering along, on the alert for discoveries, I come to a point where the river sweeps with a graceful curve to the south. There a wilful little stream hastens to join the gray river, as if allured by the verdant meadow, and gurgling and purling, it goes on its winsome way eastward. Rich mosses of velvet pile and softness line its

rim, and from this bed as the season advances, quivering fans of maidenhair will rise.

On all sides Spring is writing her signature in characters of budding loveliness. Grassy knolls and shadowy dingles, yonder woodland wrapped in blue mist, the wrinkled waters of the river, now in the flush of sunset running like wine, all contend in amiable rivalry for the palm of beauty.

The tide of verdure is rising higher and higher. Soon all the earth will be immersed in an emerald sea—a sea that will break into a bewildering foam of flowers when timid April has yielded her throne to winsome May and passionate-hearted June.

## THE OUT-DOOR WORLD



## THE OUT-DOOR WORLD

WHEN skies are gray, and the mercury in the thermometer is hastening zero-ward, it costs us nothing to resign ourselves to the charms of a cozy room with our favorite studies or authors at our elbow. Given this state of affairs, and our surroundings by contrast with the bleak outer world, become doubly delightful. If the printed page tires us the pictures upon the wall afford pleasant rest for the eye; the plants in the window are to us a bit of summer, and we are not tempted from pen or book by attractions from without.

But the scene has changed. The earth has indeed rolled out of darkness into light and the annual miracle of spring is being performed right under our eyes. Our room suddenly loses its charm. It seems narrow and gloomy. The four walls cramp us as if they were those of a prison cell; the budding trees and flowers put to shame the plants in the window, and the bright world out of doors, with a thousand wheedling tongues,

teases us to go forth and yield ourselves to her sweet seductions. We hesitate, we waver, we finally surrender ourselves to beauty's blandishments. Let him who is proof against them cast at us the first stone.

Never does one feel his kinship with Mother Earth so strongly as in the early days of spring-time. If our hearts are in the right place, there is a prodigious tugging at the strings thereof, and we feel like being at peace with all the world and his wife.

The attractions of the spring opening are many and varied. To enumerate a few of them: Corals are the regulation jewelry for the maples, and so they depend from every available twig and branch. Standing aloof from its sisters, in lonely state, is a tree of the weeping-willow kind, whose shining, drooping wands are beginning to be faintly fledged with verdure.

A stone's throw away, the crocuses still hold their own despite the blast's rude buffetings, while the yellow daffodils unfold their crinkled petals in the near neighborhood of the poet's narcissus. But a sweeter, wilder beauty is to be found in woodland ways. Like the night, the steep incline of the river bank has a thousand eyes,

owing to the blue-eyed hepaticas growing so lavishly over its brown face.

The graceful shoots of the wild raspberry bend across the path, their reddish-brown surface covered with a plum-like bloom, through which the tender leaflets are shyly peeping. Hard by is a meadow carpeted with green plush, which Spring's handmaids, the air, the sun and the showers, have spread for her coming.

A stroll through the orchard is not without its pleasures. The low stature and roundish, comfortable forms of the apple trees, so far from repelling, seem rather to invite familiarity. Just now, every scraggy limb, every knotted branch, bursting with leafage, has become a study for an artist, and to some eyes they take on a beauty second only to that which will be theirs when their picturesque ruggedness is buried in the snowy foam of apple blossoms.

There is no mistake about it, the earth has awakened from her long nap, or rather it is a resurrection at which we are assisting. The angels of springtime have rolled away the stone from Nature's tomb; she has risen, and with noiseless tread flits over hill and wold, under ashen arcades of the forest, and by the river's brink, breathing the beauty of verdure everywhere.

The van of the great bird army has entered into possession of its own again. There is a whir of wings, a swift darting from tree to tree and general tuning up of feathered throats that promises well for the musical chanting of bird matins and vespers. Amid such light, color, movement and song, where is the gloomy philosopher who would dare to ask, "Is life worth living?"

## A SUMMER SIESTA



## A SUMMER SIESTA

THE long, languorous days of August have cast their spell over the earth. Little by little, nature yields to the seductive influence and sinks into her summer sleep. Lazily-languid like southern beauties, the hours follow each other in slow succession. A faint haze falls veil-like over the land, where a perfect summer day—a gorgeous tropic flower—has blossomed from the calyx of the dawn.

In the sky alone is infinite variety. Yesterday, it bent above the earth a hemisphere of thinnest turquoise, fleckless as those Tuscan skies travelers delight to recall. Looking upward, I watch the sunlight as it spills itself upon the foliage, and I see the oak leaves making argent-green arabesques upon the blue of the sky.

To-day a chain of cloud-cliffs guards the coast of some cloudland Albion, while all below is a faint blue suggestive of leagues of ocean that had fallen asleep at their feet. But the moments stealthily move on. An hour ago, the sky, like a

sea, was covered with cloud-yachts, all their white wings spread. Now, I look up from my book, and lo! the airy shallopss have sailed away to far harbors of the nether world.

Stroll where I will, the river like a magnet, sooner or later, draws me to its brink. Brimming and brown, it glides silently on, a web of wrinkled silk spread for some royal progress. There are trees along its banks and reflected trees in its waters. I hear, now and then, the stream's low, musical gurgle as it speaks in passing to the stones and tree-roots that would bar its onward flow. The willows nestle far out on the water, as if, beguiled by its lazy lulling, they had fallen asleep upon its surface.

Along its banks, the wild grapevine runs riot over the low trees and bushes. It winds its long arms round and round them; rings each leaf-stem with its tendrils, finally covers them past all recognition with a new foliage. Here it forms a bower, leaf-thatched and sequestered, a fit abode for some shy nymph of the woods; there, it clammers up that tall maple sapling, clasping it in a leafy embrace, its long wavy sprays falling downward, until the effect is that of a cataract of green foliage.

A vagrant breeze, a baby zephyr, escaped with

its lustier brothers from the cave of *Æolus*, stirs the tree-tops, making the feathery locust leaflets break into multitudinous twinklings; the oaks sigh faintly and the aspen leaves, all a-tremble, show their silvery side.

Over all the land, the activity of the months of flower and song is replaced by a brooding peace. The metallic whir of insect life pierces the hot silence. Most of the winged minstrels that so gaily chanted their matins and vespers when the year was young, have dropped out from the feathered choir; indeed all birdland might almost be "in retreat," so general is the silence.

And yet, now and again, one or two bird voices are heard. The song sparrow lilts blithely from bush and garden wall. The goldfinch, oared by swift wings, rises and dips in the aerial sea, dropping his musical triplets as he skims the "upper deep." The now mute robins, sociable and confiding to the last, make their own of our lawns, to-day even to the number of a baker's dozen. As these are days of political bolters and conventions, the unusually large number provokes the query: Is it a bird convention, and are these delegates, met to nominate a ticket for some high functionary of robinland?

All the robins wear waistcoats of the same

color, though, from their faded condition, they must have seen service in other campaigns. Looking more closely, I decide that this is not a bird convention, after all, and incline strongly to the opinion that it is a lawn party, with the attractions of dancing a feature of the programme. Any fair-minded observer would justify me in this opinion, judging by the minuet-like movements of the birds. The maneuvers are, it must be admitted, robbed somewhat of grace by the haste with which the "dancers" execute the call of the supposed floor manager; however, this is compensated for by the long pauses between.

But this theory also I am forced to dismiss as untenable, in view of the fact that simultaneously all the robins begin viciously to prod the ground. Before I can reach a satisfactory conclusion, the sound of approaching footsteps gives the signal for every robin to take to his wings, and the lawn is again silent and deserted.

My birds having flown, I betake me to the rosary circle, in the heart of which Trinity Arbor stands swathed in clinging vines, with the cups of the scarlet honeysuckle gleaming therefrom like curling flames. A few steps away, the hydrangea inflorescence, luxuriant beyond words, bends low its weight of beauty over the green turf—its very

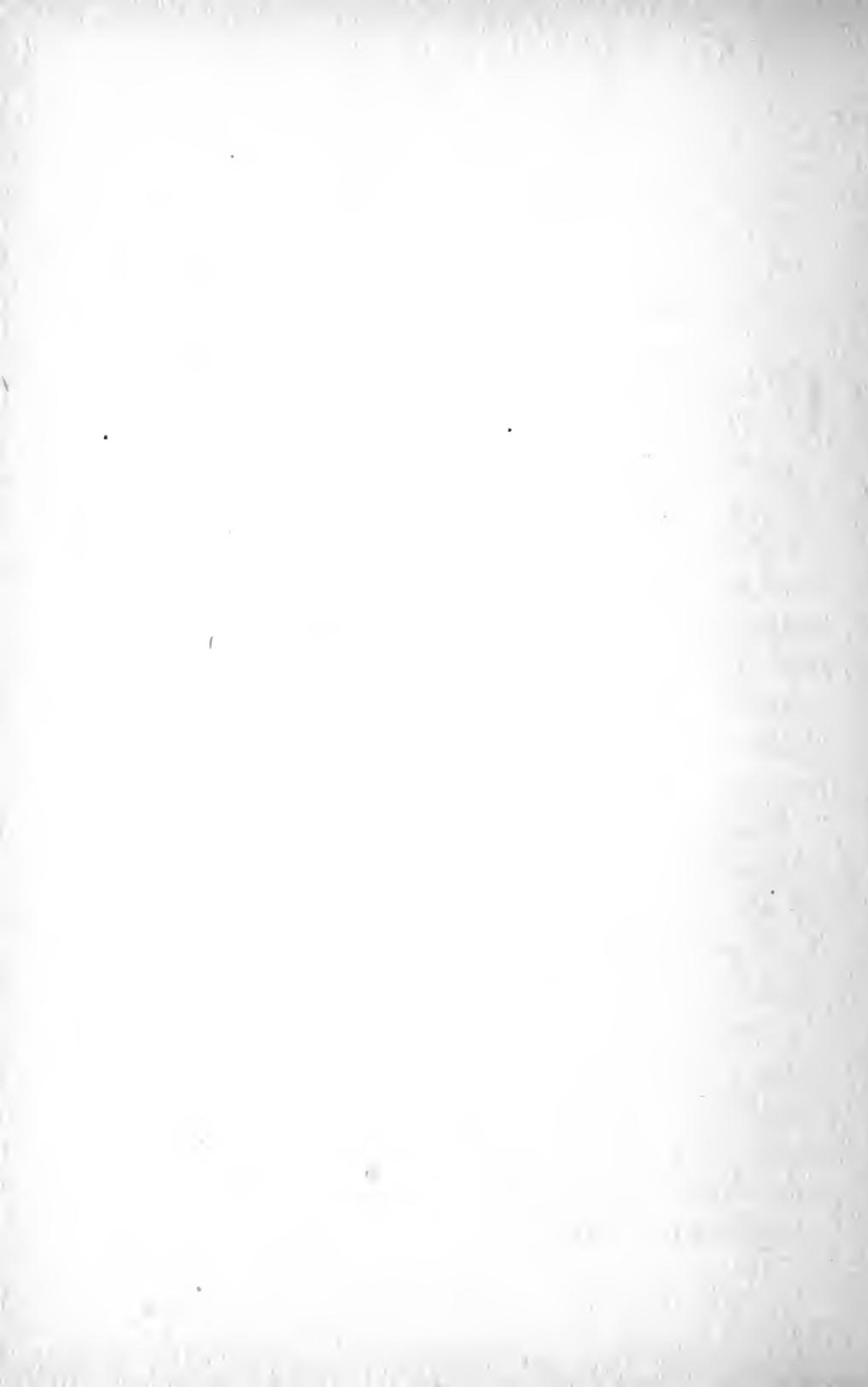
attitude an object lesson to the effect that the truly great are truly humble.

Yonder the Assumption lilies, white as no fuller on earth can make white, draw me with their fragrance and charm, and I seem to hear a voice that once floated over the blue waves of Genezareth saying in tones of silvery sweetness: "Consider the lilies of the field."

Glancing upward, I see the red berries of the mountain ash gleam among the leaves, like tiny cardinal birds in a cage of latticed green, and across the road the apple trees are ablush with rosy fruit. Summer has fulfilled its promise in letter and in spirit; its dream is over. What though an evening sadness lingers round its going, we see it depart, not with hearts wholly bowed down, for friend-like it will return, to lay again at our feet—God willing—its largess of loveliness.



## A FEW BIRD NOTES



## A FEW BIRD NOTES

**I**F anything can offset the seductions of the morning nap, it is surely the grand open-air concert with which "our sisters the birds," each June day-dawn, salute the rising sun. Fired with the zeal of the would-be bird student, I ventured forth not long since, just as dawn was tinting the eastern sky. In every tree-top, grove and hedge-row, the birds were holding high carnival, until each bit of foliage became a song fountain, so recklessly did the singers abandon themselves to their mad minstrelsy.

And yet their madness, like Hamlet's, had method in it, for in the apparently hopeless tangle of song, the trained ear could recognize the peculiar carol of the leading harmony-weavers. Half hidden by the broad leaves of the sycamore, the brown thrush, moved by the magic of the hour, poured out his heart in a solo of ecstatic sweetness. Then the gay little song sparrow, mounting a twig of the lilac hedge, embroidered the musical fabric with a series of trills and canary-like cadenzas.

Not to be out-done by his feathered cousins, the restless catbird forgot to mew, and lifting up his voice, gave vent to a series of vocal pyrotechnics in which, however, the feline note was faintly discernible. The robins, too, were out in full force. Perched here and there among the maples that line the avenue, each member of the family seemed impressed with the notion that he had a message to the human race, which he proceeded to deliver, if a trifle monotonously, at least with a right good will. As the red-headed wood-pecker beat a tattoo upon the tree trunk, the mournful note of the wood-dove came from the shadowy depths of the neighboring ravine, giving that touch of sadness inseparably connected with every scene of earthly beauty.

While listening to this morning bird revelry, the ear caught the whir of wings, the eye noted the yellow-coated oriole, fluting cheerily as he sped across the blue, and the scarlet tanager, flashing his bright plumage among the green of the foliage.

But does the charm cease with the morning concert? The bird lover will answer emphatically, no, since it grows by what it feeds on, and he finds that once under the spell, it is wellnigh impossible to shake it off. So the devotee, armed with pa-

tience and a field glass, betakes himself to the woods and glades in quest of bird-lore.

There, much that is curious and interesting comes to his knowledge. For instance, he becomes conscious that Master Robin when perched upon a tree-top, and the same bird taking a stroll across the lawn, assume different attitudes toward inquisitive man. He who let fall an incessant shower of notes from the swaying branches, when he alights upon the turf is strangely silent. His method of locomotion is also characteristic. To me, there is just a tinge of melancholy connected with this promenade of his robin-ship over the grass. He is wont to stand motionless as long as three minutes, with gaze fixed upon some point in the distance, as if waiting and watching for some feathered friend who tarries by the way. His gait, too, is strangely at variance with his solemn demeanor, for, while I watch his maneuvers at a respectful distance and through my glass, he begins to run, at a rate so brisk as to convey the idea that he suddenly remembers an engagement with a bird-friend and fears to miss the appointment.

Yet, with all this show of eagerness, he seems to think better of it, for a few inches from the starting point he stops as suddenly as he set out, and resumes his pensive air, as if in trying to solve

the problems of robin-life, he had become a trifle disillusioned. Still notwithstanding this listlessness which he affects in his aimless ramblings, I half suspect it but veils his purpose of securing the prey then hiding beneath the sod.

Among the feathered race, the catbird is an odd character. Strolling along the river bank one morning, I was lured by the robin-like notes that fell from the foliage of a tree, but leveling my field glass to the agitated leaves, I discovered that I had been deceived by the mimicry of the catbird. His slate-hued plumage, changing to plum color in the sunlight, stood revealed, and, as if to clinch the matter, he betrayed himself by the unmistakable mew to which he owes his name.

Later in the day, a pair of these birds, taking a ramble under the pines and maples of the lawn, proved an interesting study. The male bird, in form more graceful than his spouse, foraged around in the grass, hopping here and there as a stray fly invited pursuit. Now he picked up sundry dry leaves and tossed them disdainfully to right and left of him, and now he made frantic efforts to snap up a gauzy insect, flying tantalizingly near. The insect's course proving too zigzag for the bird, he flew to a cedar near by, and in a series of mews, seemed to relieve his mind. By

way of experiment, a listener treated him to a specimen of his own mimicry, until the catbird, completely losing his temper, flew away, uttering as he took wing, a discordant cry, like the last word of a scold ere she takes her departure from the scene of a quarrel.

In a low hedge bordering the avenue, during the past summer a pair of thrushes had gone house-keeping, and when my attention was first called to them, three half-fledged birdlings nestled in the family home. The site of the latter was ill-chosen, for each pedestrian out for an evening walk stopped to inspect the young thrushes, much to the distress of the mother-bird, who mounted guard from a neighboring post. The male bird, summoned by the cries of his spouse, now arrived on the scene, carrying the little ones' supper in his bill. The twain took possession of a branch overhanging the nest and waited with admirable patience for the coast to become clear, when they joined their frightened birdlings.

The next morning, though our visit was an early one, we found the birds had flown. An empty nest met our disappointed gaze, and though a pair of thrushes could be seen flitting in and out of the lilac hedge hard by their late home, the bird youngsters were nowhere visible. It looked as if

Mr. and Madame Thrush had resented the unusual prying into their private affairs the evening previous, and avoided a repetition of the same by removing to other quarters.

A word about the house wren. A certain May morning two seasons ago, I was surprised and delighted by a bird-song of peculiar sweetness just outside my window. Tracing the song to the singer, I found the latter to be a tiny brown bird of the wren family, who with his mate had opened a nursery over the academy porch. That initial performance was the prelude to many a delicious roundelay poured from the small throat which seemed an almost perpetual fount of song, bubbling over with dulcet melody. He has now, perhaps, flown to kindlier skies, but his enchanting rondels cling to the memory with those of his various feathered relatives, by whose notes the sweet poetry of summer was set to music.

## **BIRDS IN THE BUSH**



## BIRDS IN THE BUSH

THE way of the bird-lover, like that of the transgressor, is hard. Far from being a primrose path of dalliance, it bristles with difficulties; yet once under the fascinations of bird-dom, there is no shaking off the spell. Some spring morning, when all the world is awaking to love and beauty, you hear an enchanting song. Your heart gives a bound—the true bird-lover knows what I mean—at the prospect of renewing acquaintance with feathered friends of last year. Straightway, the charm takes effect, nor is it broken until the last winged loiterer has spread his wings for the South.

As for myself, I surrender at once and unconditionally. I am content, if need be, to linger by brooksides, to go out into the open, or pull myself through incredibly small spaces in hedgerows, if only the quest promises success. Sometimes it is wisdom to seat oneself at the foot of a tree, where, from every leafy branch, every gray twig, melody—a very rain of it—drops down.

To gossip a bit concerning my feathered friends. This year the robin came early upon the scene, preaching his optimistic doctrine of cheer from every available tree-pulpit. When, however, he wanders in a semi-aimless manner across the lawn, he is most provocative of mirth. The gravity of his deportment when he falls into those meditative pauses of his, is in ridiculous contrast with his undignified gait when in pursuit of an insect on the wing.

The other day Master Robin, strolling along the grass, drew near the lilac hedge and gazed perhaps a trifle too curiously within. As if resenting this prying upon her domestic concerns, out darted a thrush. Thereupon followed a good deal of billing, but a strict regard for the truth compels me to add, no cooing. The robin doubtless saw—if robins reason—that the thrush was prepared to make a spirited stand for his rights. If he had a legal mind, perhaps he reflected that possession is nine points of the law, and, so with a well-assumed air of indifference—I had almost said a yawn—his robinship wisely turned away and resumed his meditative meanderings.

The black bird, or, to be more scientific, the purple grackle, is a bird not so fond of the bush that he is unwilling to spend half his time upon the

grass, especially if it afford good foraging ground. In form he is symmetrical. He wears a suit of conventional black—bronze in certain lights—his head and neck being clad in glossy purple, brilliantly iridescent in the sunlight. His gait, alas! is something of a waddle and he expresses his feelings in a voice that suggests the filing of saws, or as if he had suffered from chronic bronchitis, pronounced incurable by the physicians of birddom. At St. Mary's, the evergreens of the rosary circle are his habitat and he flits about like a bird of ill-omen. I like him not.

In striking contrast to the grackle is the yellow warbler, the daintiest bit of featherhood that flies. His taste is esthetic. He shows it by his selection of a summer home. In early May, right up among the nodding plumes of lilac lane, he builds his nest. Like a winged and animated daffodil blending yellow with the pale green of spring, he darts hither and yon. A gayer, livelier little sprite does not exist. There he is now, skimming low over the lawn. Now he vaults over the lilac hedge, trilling his saucy snatch of song, piercing in its sweetness.

Not long since I watched the evolutions of a pair of these living sunbeams. They were evidently out for a frolic. They chased each other

in mad revelry, cutting in mid-air a series of circles, ellipses, triangles and tangents that would delight the eye and heart of a mathematician. Just when affairs seemed coming to a crisis, they cut a few parting capers and disappeared within the shrubbery.

The American goldfinch, with his yellow dress, black cap, wings and tail, is another feathered mite that easily wins his way to our hearts. The other day I saw one of those wild canaries, as they are called, rocking on the withered limb of a tree that hangs over the St. Joseph River, while a stiff breeze buffeted and bent the tall oak to which he clung. Yet there he sat and sang, regardless of wind and weather.

The orchard, especially when it wears its robe of white petals faintly flushed with rose, is a paradise for goldfinches. The observer has but to seat himself at the foot of one of those huge bouquets—the apple trees—and half a dozen or more are sure to flutter into view, singing as they take their undulating flight and so to say, looping the trees with music.

The brown thrush—alack! that the hermit and wood thrushes waste their heavenly notes upon the silence of dim woodlands—the brown thrush guards his nest with jealous care. He is past mas-

ter in the tricks by which he eludes pursuit to the family abode. In and out of the shrubbery he glides, and just as I promise myself that the nest is in sight, I part the bushes and find—nothing!

But if he conceals his domestic arrangements from the public eye, when he wishes to give the world a specimen of his lyrical accomplishments, he mounts the topmost twig of a tall tree. From this coign of vantage and as if courting attention, he treats you to his entire repertory. His style is brilliant and florid. Now he seems to scold, but it is a musical scolding and you forgive him. Then he gives utterance to what seems to my ear like an imperative “come here, come here!”

Next follows a sharp “tut, tut,” as if expressing contempt for some inaudible remark of his spouse. For a bird, he has wonderful staying powers. I have watched him for wellnigh half an hour at a stretch, as with tail at a right angle to his red-brown back, he sprinkled the sward with melody. Some of his amorous notes would discount the proverbial blandishments of a Celtic lover. His song over, he drops to earth with the very poetry of motion.

The catbird has his admirers. I am not one of them, though I grant him a gracefully-molded form, clad in a trim, quaker-like garb of slate.

His movements seem stealthy and sly, and to me, this is the chief blot on his 'scutcheon. His temper, too, is, I fancy, uncertain, if one may judge by the rasping sounds that proceed from his quarters. In fact, these birds can make the gloaming hideous with their "cat-calls," or hidden in the thick leafage, give utterance to witching notes which, if unaccompanied by the feline mew, would have a sorcery all their own.

Ornithologists seem to consider the rose-breasted grosbeak a true *rara avis*. If so, we who dwell near the St. Joseph River are favored. Any day I stroll to its banks my eyes are regaled by the sight of his black-and-white coat, while over his vest he wears a rose-carmine shield. The flush of color extending under the wings suggests, when he is in flight, the rose lining of a lady's mantle. His beak is clumsy—nay, it is gross, yet one forgets this as he listens to the bubbling, liquid notes that drip from it—notes blithe enough, yet having a slightly reminiscent quality.

"The scarlet oriole's wooing call  
Reiterate rings through the gray-gold air,"

I catch myself repeating as, day after day, I listen, enamored, to the plaintive fluting of the Baltimore oriole. He is not chary of his beauty—

this gorgeous fellow in feathers—but lets the eye of the bird-lover feast upon his brilliancy until that individual is satisfied. Watch him as he flits in and out among the leaves of yonder tree. With black head and orange-red breast against the tender green of the foliage, he looks not unlike a tongue of flame tipped with jet.

His is your true love-lorn voice. First there is the wooing call with its touch of plaintive pleading. He is a persistent wooer, but his song, even when most energetic, has a minor strain. Now it is clear, flutelike, amorous, but always a little dashed with melancholy, until the listener's heart almost aches for very sympathy with this lover in plumes. One is forced to conclude that the feminine bird-heart that can resist him must be made of unimpressionable stuff indeed.

And what of the scarlet tanager, that lyrical bit of the tropics? Brilliantly scarlet as to head and body, black as to wings and tail, he compels admiration. Rare, like all precious things he seems to be, and thrice only this year has he come within my field of vision. But he is an impressionist and his beauty and grace defy forgetfulness.

In a tangled copse where the river rolls with its most sinuous grace, I first saw the indigo bunting. The start of delight the sight of him gave me,

thrice and four times repaid the fatigues of that botanical walk. With heaven's own color on his head and breast, he looked as if he had soared aloft to the blue and dipped his plumage in the sky's azure. A song, bright, dulcet and low, completed the charm, and then and there I lost my heart to the indigo bunting.

Many other birds there are in bush and on the wing that have sung themselves into my good graces concerning which I must perforce be silent. Since they so appeal to our poor human hearts I cannot but think that they, of all the lower creation, are God's darlings. Did not the Boy-Christ—so runs the legend—once mold a bird in clay and send it singing and soaring from his dear hand?

Are you gay-hearted? Then go forth and exult with the feathered lyrists. Are you a trifle sad with something like an ache tugging at your heart-strings? Then more than ever go forth and let the birds sing away your sorrow.

A BUNCH OF WILD FLOWERS



## A BUNCH OF WILD FLOWERS

THE members of the flower aristocracy dwell for the most part in the heat-laden atmosphere of the conservatory. They have beauty of form; brilliant or delicate dyes stain their petals; their very breath maketh glad the nostrils; but when all is told, they do not appeal to us with the winning sweetness of their sister blooms—the wild flowers of meadow and woodland. For this reason, we accept the first invitation of incense-breathing spring and hasten right merrily to those secluded nooks where wild flowers most do congregate.

Changeful April, a smile on her lip and a tear in her eye, is holding her brief sway over the earth; there is a stir in the woods and the robin's cry breaks the silence of songless days; there is a balminess in the air that caresses the cheek as if with the sweep of downy wings and everything speaks of the new birth of the flowers.

Sauntering along the bluff overlooking the St. Joseph River, the glance is caught by the white

gleam of the blood-root. A few days of sunshine has coaxed it from the earth, but as it lifts its snowy head above the ground we see that it is closely wrapped in a pale green cloak—the deeply-lobed leaf of the parent plant. Soon the folds fall away from the white beauty within, and the latter swells into a blossom, discarding as it expands the tan-colored vesture of its two sepals. Take a long lingering look at its pure petals and golden heart; it will be absent at your next stroll, for it is transitory as fair: the first rude wind will shatter its loveliness.

Opening its blue eyes, sometimes near a late snow-bank, smiles up to us the hepatica, its beautiful azure certainly stolen from summer skies. One drawback it has, to be sure—its foliage is not in keeping with its azure beauty, for it must, perforce, content itself with last year's rusty growth until sometime after the blossoms have appeared, when new leaves begin to uncurl themselves. With the herbarium-maker it finds special favor. Transferred from the sunny hillside to the spotless page, it seems to take kindly to its new quarters, and when in company with a goodly number of its fellows, they stand out from the white background with charming effect.

That flower-lover, Bryant, singing of his boyhood haunts, says:

“Within the woods  
Whose young and half-transparent leaves scarce cast  
A shade, gay circles of anemones  
Danced on their stalks.”

Here, too, in our Indiana woods, as Spring hastens up from the south, they make her path bright, for thousands of white anemones star the green turf, and the eager gatherer pauses in sheer bewilderment before their profusion. But high on the river bank, as if courting the rude blast, are oftenest found the pale purple variety, or the delicate pink blooms of this same wild flower. The breezes that wrinkle the waters below, sweep up with added force; our flower, apparently fragile as fair, bends, sways and quivers, but firmly anchored to the ground it holds its position and after the storm our eyes are greeted as before, by the tremulous beauty of the slender-stemmed anemone.

The purslane family boasts a beauteous member, as, for that matter, what family does not? Let me give its points, good, bad and indifferent: stem often reclining; leaves two, opposite, long, narrow; flowers white with pink veins, or pink

with deeper colored veins, growing in loose clusters; sepals two, petals five. What flower-lover does not know that this is a word-picture of the spring beauty? This blossom opens its pinkish petals in April or May, wasting its sweetness on a brook's edge or fringing the wet woods. The dainty flower is sensitive to weather changes and closes should the sky become overcast, when only the most brilliant sunlight can coax it to show its blushing face.

“The lily blows a bugle call of fragrance o'er the lea,” sings the Hoosier poet, but doubtless it was the stately gleaming chalice beloved of the florist that inspired his muse. There is another flower by botanists called the trillium, but known to the elect—the enthusiastic wild-flower gatherer—by the sweeter name, white wood-lily. This exquisite flower unveils its snowy beauty to the sunlight that may sift through the feathery foliage of the spring woods. Above the whorl formed by the three ovate leaves, it lifts its head, with something of its aristocratic cousin's stately grace, or again it shyly droops over its green vesture, like a sweet rustic lass in the presence of the great. Borne from its woodland home, it submits with a good grace to its new environment,—a vase and

fresh, cool water,—and for many days will gladden the eye with its shy loveliness.

Under the murmuring pines and in light sandy soil grows another wildwood beauty. Beneath last year's dead brown leaves it hides, with its clustering sisters, but its fragrant breath betrays its presence and soon the trailing arbutus lies revealed in all its pink waxiness. New Englanders call these sweet bloomlets "mayflowers," and Whittier is responsible for the statement that these were the first blossoms to greet the Pilgrims after the fearful winter of 1620. Hence their name, in honor of the historic ship and because of their season of flowering.

In the drama of *Cymbeline*, we read that when Cloten would play the wooer, he assails his lady's ear with the song:

“Hark, hark! the lark at Heaven's gate sings  
And Phoebus 'gins arise,  
His steeds to water at those springs,  
On chaliced flowers that lies;  
And winking Mary-buds begin  
To ope their golden eyes.”

Thus embalmed in the amber of Shakspearean verse is the marsh marigold, since marybuds, so says competent authority, are identical with the

gay marigolds that every April border our springs and gladden our wet meadows. How often, in search of daintier blooms, we have picked our careful steps over this golden pavement, challenged by their very brilliancy to make them part of our floral spoil!

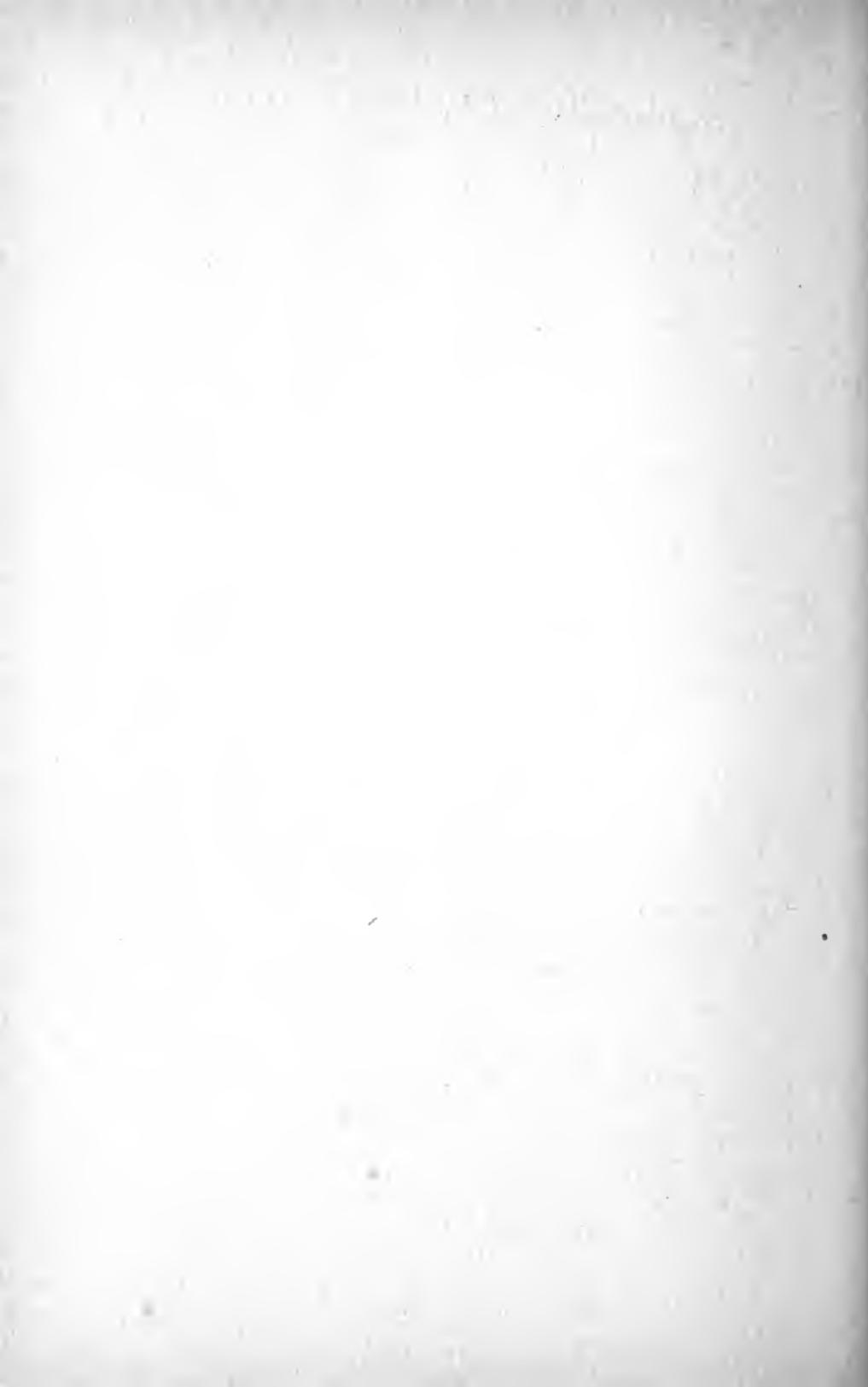
The columbine, happy combination of red and gold, loves inaccessible nooks. There perched upon some rocky ledge, it shines, jewel-like, upon the despoiler, tempting him to perilous feats that he may make its loveliness his own. The beauty of its vase-like, nectar-laden petals is equaled only by its delicate sepals, its pendulous stamens and pistils, all uniting to make the perfection of its form. Under its spell was Emerson when he wrote:

“A woodland walk,  
A quest of river-grapes, a mocking thrush,  
A wild rose or rock-loving columbine  
Salve my worst wounds.”

When “the sweet south breathes o'er a bank of violets, stealing and giving odor,” we direct our steps thereto, for who does not know the spot where the nodding violets grow? There, spread out like a carpet, they lie; we revel in their profusion; delight in their gentle beauty; make them

our prisoners and bear home this bit of woodland charm to gladden other hearts. Perhaps of all the children of the woods, these best suggest the dawning year, and certainly none are more closely knit to the days when life was full of promise.

Tangled in the long grass of the roadside, or giving a touch of rustic grace to the zigzag fence of the country lane, gleam the pale pink stars of the wild rose. Scott assures us that "the rose is fairest when 'tis washed with morning dew," and as our ramble brings us face to face with these lovely blooms in whose hearts tremble the "limpid tears of night," we quite agree with him. We gather it despite its thorny surroundings and add it to our growing cluster. Then with heroic effort we resist the fragment summons of many another forest blossom, pursuing our homeward way over a path that nature if not man has strewn with flowers.



## **FLOWER-LORE**



## FLOWER-LORE

**I**N the lovely pageant that greets our eyes as we stroll along the river bank in the bright May-days, the flowering dogwood plays an important part. In our locality it often becomes a tree of goodly dimensions, looking like a huge bouquet as it stands in white relief against the delicate green of the budding maples. The cornel family, of which it is a member, boasts a classic association. Perhaps near of kin to our Indiana species was that which Virgil tells us grew from the heart of the murdered Polydorus, and whose shoots so strongly resisted the efforts of "pious Æneas" to uproot them.

Be that as it may, our representative of the family wears a showy involucre of four petal-like leaves which is commonly mistaken for the blossom itself, but in reality is only the cream-colored setting for the small greenish flowers that form the clustering center.

In the early spring, before the surrounding trees have put on their green drapery, another flower-

ing shrub—called by the uninitiated, a tree—dawns ghostlike upon our vision. Its white-petaled blossoms grow in loose racemes, with a fleecy, fringy effect, fair to look upon, but shorn of half their beauty if severed from the parent shrub. The whole startling apparition bears the prosaic name, Shad bush.

Yonder is a tree, upon whose bare, gaunt limbs swarms of purplish-red butterflies seem to have alighted. You approach cautiously, but there is no flutter of the half-folded wings, for the seeming butterflies are in reality the papilionaceous flowers of the Judas tree, and will stay till you come for them. “How chances it that the tree bears a name so ill-omened?” is often asked. The only answer given is that of the old writer, Gerard, who quaintly says: “This is the tree whereon Judas did hang himself and not on the elder tree as it is said.”

Leaving behind us these mid-air bouquets, we enter the inviting precincts of a shadowy copse. There, silently addressing his flower audience, stands a certain pulpit orator whose name is a household word—viz., Jack-in-the-pulpit. Only his sturdy head is visible above the enclosure, but peering behind the latter, we find that he wears

for clerical robe a garment of stamens and pistils extending to his feet. The elaborate pulpits in our city churches cannot bear comparison with that erected in the silent woods. Notice the beauty of the curves, the graceful, flowing outline of Jack's pulpit. Sometimes his sounding board is of a light green, veined with a darker tint, and again it is stained with purple, caught, says the old legend, beneath the cross on the day of the crucifixion.

The May apples have for some days raised their green umbrellas, as their drooping, peltate leaves are popularly called. Snugly hidden under these same umbrellas, they guard their snowy complexion from the too ardent sun; you will miss them if you are loath to bend, for they are hardly visible otherwise; it is, in fact, a case where you must stoop to conquer.

Strolling through the May woods one is sure to find great patches of the dark blue blooms of the greek valerian, the latter bending gracefully over the heavily-laden stems. The botanists describe them as "campanulate," advisedly, for their many-blossomed clusters suggest to the imaginative mind nothing so much as a chime of bells. To carry out the illusion, their pendulous sta-

mens, hanging below the edge of the nodding corolla, may be likened to bell clappers, making fairy music for the surrounding flowers.

With strange inconsistency, the pretty and suggestive name, wake-robin, has been given to a spring flower possessing but few claims to beauty. However, as it unfurls its signal of three crimson petals to the breeze, it gives a vivid dash of color to the somber surroundings of the dim woodland, and thus serves as a foil for its less showy neighbors.

“Blue, papilionaceous, in a long raceme,” says the botanist when he would describe the bright clusters of wild lupine that make themselves so much at home in the sandy soil along our river. This is the flower about which Thoreau writes so enthusiastically. He says: “The lupine is now in its glory. It paints a whole hill-side with its blue, making such a field as Proserpina might have wandered in. Its leaf was made to be covered with dewdrops. I am quite excited by the prospect of blue flowers in clumps—such a profusion of the heavenly, the Elysian color, as if they were the Elysian fields!”

When Wordsworth wished to convey an idea of the obduracy of one Peter Bell he says:

“In vain through every changeful year  
Did nature lead him as before;  
A primrose by the river’s brim  
A yellow primrose was to him,  
And it was nothing more.”

Not, however, of the flower made famous by Wordsworth do we write, but of its American cousin, our own evening primrose. Walking along the roadside in the summer twilight, we are pleasantly conscious of a faint, delicious fragrance on the evening air. Tracing home this odorous breath, we are surprised to find ourselves face to face with a tall, rank-growing plant, bearing alternate, lance-shaped leaves and resplendent with a mass of fragile yellow flowers. By a seeming caprice of nature, these blooms unfold their petals to the moon and stars, but when morning comes, their delicate beauty has taken flight, and we see only faded flowers. However, the object of their brief existence has been accomplished, for we are told that their fertilization is secured through the visit of the pink night-moth, the latter being led to the pale yellow petals by their mute but fragrant invitation.

Apostrophizing the flower-de-luce, or blue flag, Longfellow breaks into melody thus:

“Born to the purple, born to joy and pleasance  
Thou dost not toil nor spin;  
But makest glad and radiant with thy presence,  
The meadow and the lin.”

Among wild flowers, so regal is its color and bearing, it seems a fitting emblem for a royal house. In the palmy days of France's glory, its embroidered petals, shining rainbow-like from many a silken banner, often led the gallant and heroic to victory or mayhap “to dusty death.” This flower is especially beloved of bees, and it is a curious sight to watch them sway for a moment on the recurved sepals and then disappear within the cup in search of hidden nectar.

When June is on her rose-wreathed throne, a slender plant hung with tremulous flowers springs up along the high bank of the river. Its corolla, a dark blue, nods from a hair-like stalk and its dainty beauty tempts us to wrest it from its wind-swept ledge. But it seems to resent the profane touch of its gatherer, for though steadily bearing up in the teeth of a gale, snatched from its native soil, it immediately withers and dies. We call it the harebell, and like to believe that it is a near relative of those highland bluebells whose praises the Scotch poets are so fond of singing.

But to do even scant justice to a tithe of the

flowers that clothe our brown earth as with a blossom-robe, is beyond our art. This much is certain: he who is content to receive his wild-flowers at second hand, knows not what pleasure he misses thereby. Would you have more than a nodding acquaintance with the flowery creation? Then you must seek its shy members in their favorite haunts.



## **CONCERNING COLOR**



## CONCERNING COLOR

MUCH has been said and written in regard to the music of nature's orchestra—a music woven mainly of bird-notes, wind-song and the deep basso of the ocean. Without seeking to underrate its spell, let me call attention to a harmony of another kind—the color harmony whose silent music appeals to the eye alone. This color-music boasts a vast compass, a gamut of amazing possibilities, beside which the chromatic scale of music proper, to us of the laity, seems to sink into insignificance.

To trace these color tones to their source. The outer world is flooded with sunlight. I coax a single beam into my room through an aperture in the shutter, and placing a prism in its path, it gives up its beautiful secret—the brilliant colors that blend to form the rainbow's arch lie revealed. But this is not all, for between these seven primary notes of the color-scale come the intermediate shades, like an almost infinite number of flats and sharps of the colors which they precede or follow.

Thus every object in creation wears one of these colors, or some combination of them, in accordance with the well-known law that bodies possess the power of reflecting certain colored rays of light, while absorbing all the others. The tulip cup that stands in the vase before me is yellow, because while drinking in or absorbing all the other rays of the white light in which it is bathed, it throws back the yellow ones only. Its neighbor flaunts a brilliant crimson, since owing to a mysterious something in its atomic or molecular structure, it prefers to appropriate the other colored rays, reflecting only the red ones.

Puzzling indeed, and mysterious as its parent light, is color, but blot it from the face of nature, snatch the azure from the sky, the emerald from the grass and foliage, the blush from the cheek, and how gruesome would be the world! In the springtime, the note of green is the dominant one; the cloudless arch supplies the blue, and as summer advances, the other notes of the scale are struck by waving grain fields, flower-enameled lawns and dim woodlands.

Autumn comes on apace. Then indeed is the color-gamut sounded from its lowest note to the top of its compass. Of these countless tones, half-tones and quarter-tones—to indulge in musical

phraseology—is woven that magnificent color-harmony which ravishes the eye in gazing upon the autumnal woods. It is the swan-song of color sung by the dying year.

Some one playing with fancy has not inaptly called birds the flowers of the air, and as they soar upward, many of them are not unlike winged blossoms, contributing no small share to the brilliant dyes with which nature decks herself. As if to make amends for their silence, birds that have no song in their throats, dazzle the beholder by the brilliancy of their plumage. Thus in the sun-drenched tropics, the lyre-bird, the peacock and the bird-of-paradise look like so many fragments of that arch that spans the sky during a summer shower.

Another domain in which color reigns supreme is the modern boudoir. Would you be convinced of the fact, invade its charming precincts. You pause at the threshold to feast the eye on the beauty of silken hangings in whose texture the flush of the pink is faintly visible; on walls and ceilings to which pale apple-green gives the keynote; on borders where olive blends with pink in happy harmony; and gazing, your pronounce it a symphony in color.

In yonder casket is a sparkling, shimmering

mass. Magnetized by its beauty, you draw near to see the amethyst press its violet facets against the rose-cut diamond, the latter flashing prismatic hues at every angle. There the velvety emerald nestles near the glowing ruby, the modest pearls throw off a faint iridescence, while the opal bears a miniature rainbow in its heart. If you are imaginative, you will pronounce it a casket of crystallized color.

The cunning weaver of silks understands this color-charm and he lays the three kingdoms under tribute to furnish him with hues to catch the glance of the beauty-loving. Calling science to his aid, he makes the unsightly block of coal yield up the beautiful colors hidden therein, and, bathed in the aniline dyes, the silkworm's thread takes on those hues that prove so irresistible when from the shop window they tempt the unwary.

A painter dips his brush in the fount of color, and genius guiding his hand, the visions that haunt his waking dreams start into immortal life at each brush-stroke. Such is the potency of color that the radiant heavens, the somber earth are created anew upon the canvas, and seemingly even lurid flames are fanned to life by the sweep of his brush. Standing before the great masterpieces of color, the rapt gazer fancies he hears the song of the

sapphire waves; his ear catches the rustle of the painted leaves, and on the wings of color he flies heavenward where dwells the Mother-Maid whose celestial face painters never weary of limning.

But what of the pomp and pageantry of the western sky when the setting sun paints the heavens with the "fading hues of even"? Surely, there on the sky's concave is the sanctity of color writ large, or better, perhaps, then is sung a grand *Te Deum* by the seven daughters of light to Him at whose word light itself sprang into existence.



## **GEMS OF PUREST RAY**



## GEMS OF PUREST RAY

### I

IT is a curious fact that precious stones play an important part, not only in romance, but in the history of the human race. The secret lies, perhaps, in that love for the beautiful inherent in man's nature which fixes its affections upon gems and jewels as the least fleeting among objects of terrestrial beauty. To possess them seems a want, not a caprice. Recognizing this fact, poets and novelists the world over have woven around them their most brilliant romances; have given them, in fact, a setting of the finest literary gold.

Witness Rudyard Kipling in his story of "The Naulahka." His hero braves the dangers of the poisoned cup, or fronts treachery and death lurking behind lattice and bush, and all this in his efforts to satisfy one woman's passion for these flowers of the mineral kingdom. That cunning weaver of intricate plots, Wilkie Collins, felt their spell, and communicates it to readers of "The

Moonstone," who follow with feverish fascination the labyrinthine windings of the story, lighted, so to speak, by flashes of the great yellow diamond. What reader of "Lorna Dorne" does not remember the piteous appeal of that ancient sinner, Sir Counselor, to John Ridd for possession of the diamond necklace: "Oh! for God's sake, John, rob me not in this manner. There is one jewel there I can look at for hours and see all the lights of heaven in it, which I shall never see elsewhere. Give me back my jewels or else kill me!"

Again, the sheen of jewels has shed a baleful light upon many a historic picture. Especially does this love for jewels seem to have been a royal passion, and more than one monarch has been the slave of the ring. Solomon is said to have possessed a magic circlet, to which he was indebted (?) for his power over demons and genii. Alexander and Cæsar did not disdain the borrowed splendor of gems, and Pliny tells us that in the days of Roman luxury patricians sipped their wine from emerald drinking cups.

It is on record that when the Eighth Henry of England wedded his fourth bride, Anne of Cleves, he shone resplendent in diamonds, rubies and emeralds, in consequence of which the court wits,

slyly, of course, dubbed him "King of diamonds." Elizabeth, his famous daughter, inherited this fondness for jewels, and, the story goes, so far forgot her royal state as to stoop to obtain unlawful possession of the gems of the ill-fated Mary Stuart.

But, in the history of jewels, nothing is to be found quite so dramatic as the celebrated affair of the diamond necklace, by which, undeservedly, a shade was cast upon the fair name of the unfortunate Marie Antoinette. Students of history are familiar with the story, and who can say how great a part it played in precipitating the French revolution?

Their human connection being so patent, what of the gems themselves? At the risk of carrying coals to Newcastle, we must be a little didactic, premising that the coals in this case will be other than "black diamonds." As every one knows, the real charm and value of a diamond lies in its remarkable brilliancy and in the wonderful prismatic display of bright and beautiful colors. These are constantly fleeing and as constantly returning to gladden the eye of the observer, and among all the gems thus far known, only the diamond can lay claim to this singular property. But the brilliancy and rainbow-play of the diamond are not so

evident by daylight as in certain kinds of artificial light, notably that of wax candles, when, as if by magic, all its latent beauties are called forth. The production of artificial diamonds has been the *ignis fatuus* that has danced before the eyes of chemists for ages, but their efforts to crystallize carbon have not been attended with the success hoped for, as nature still refuses to yield up her secret.

Many who have long been accustomed to regard the diamond as the queen of gems will be surprised to learn that among connoisseurs, the ruby occupies a position fast becoming supreme. The Greeks called this gem anthrax, or live coal, and truly it is not a misnomer. Its color varies from the palest rose to the deepest carmine, but the most valuable tint is that peculiar shade called by jewelers, "pigeon's blood," which is a deep, rich red. Unlike the diamond, the composition of the ruby is not so well known, hence it may not be amiss to state that it is really a variety of crystallized alumina, the latter being an oxide of the metal, aluminum.

In the writings of that quaint traveler, Sir John Mandeville, among other fabulous stories, we read that the royal bed-chamber in the court of the Great Khan was lighted by a ruby that illuminated

the apartment with the brightness of day! This seems to be a companion story to the fable of the ancients that possessors of the gem were insured against poison, sadness and evil thoughts.

The sapphire is identical with the ruby in every respect, save that of color. The hues presented by this gem vary from a deep regal blue to a celestial azure, the last named possessing perfect limpidity and rich, velvety reflections that retain their splendid colors by night as well as by day. In view of this, we cannot wonder that by the Greeks it was thought worthy to be offered to Jupiter. Thus might the pen run on indefinitely, singing the praises of these poems in crystal, but it were best, perhaps, to leave for future consideration the other gems in the casket.



## **GEMS OF PUREST RAY**



## GEMS OF PUREST RAY

### II

JULES VERNE—name dear to every school-boy heart—in one of those wonder books of his, makes a certain character give this *naïve* definition of a pearl: “To the poet the pearl is a tear of the sea; to the ladies it is a jewel of an oblong shape, of a brilliancy of mother-of-pearl substance, which they wear on their fingers, their necks or their ears; for the chemist it is a mixture of phosphate and carbonate of lime with a little gelatine, and lastly, for the naturalist, it is simply a morbid secretion of the organ that produces the mother-of-pearl among certain bivalves.”

In this definition, comprehensive enough to suit every one, the author has collected the prevailing views on the subject without really unraveling the fascinating mystery of the pearl’s formation. A product of nature that has puzzled the wisest heads of antiquity, it has thus given occasion for the wildest conjecture and opinions the most con-

flicting. However, according to the prevailing view, these gems are found in the pearl-producing oyster shell, and are formed of matter similar to the mother-of-pearl which lines its walls.

To borrow a botanical term, they may be said to be exogenous in growth, since they increase by concentric layers, and their lovely luster is thought to be caused by the friction of the soft body of the oyster against the surface of the pearl. Though found in the waters of both hemispheres, the best specimens of these sea-born gems are taken from the Persian Gulf and the Bay of Condatchy, near Ceylon. In "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea," Verne—who is nothing if not sensational—invests that man of mystery, Captain Nemo, with a morbid habit of not only going down into the sea in ships, but consigning himself to the waves clad in an impervious suit of rubber. There, booted and helmeted, he and his companions were wont to walk the floor of the ocean, seventy-five fathoms below the surface!

In one of these submarine promenades, the Great Unknown visits the pearl fisheries off the island of Ceylon, where was located that wonderful bivalve, which, he gravely tells us, measured two yards and a half in breadth and contained a magnificent pearl the size of a cocoanut!

Quitting the domain of the sensational for that of fact, we learn that the best pearls are taken from the fleshy part of the oyster near the hinge of the shell. Occasionally a bivalve proves to be a veritable jewel casket, as in it are sometimes found upwards of a hundred pearls of different sizes. A disadvantage attached to the wearing of pearls is their liability to tarnish, especially if worn next the skin, when, of course, their brilliancy is lost. Nor are they like their sister gems, incorruptible, but after the lapse of years have been known to crumble to dust.

“Pale, glistening pearls,” of which the poet sings, have from the remotest ages been looked upon as among the most precious of gems. With their chaste loveliness and quiet brilliance, they are often preferred to the diamond, whose eye-dazzling splendor so imperatively demands admiration.

As to their abundance, a stream of pearls, so to speak, must have flowed through imperial Rome, judging from their lavish use in the hey-day of the empire. The Roman matrons and maids, tired perhaps of wearing them in their dark locks, used them in decorating their sandal ties. Not to be outdone by this bit of feminine foppery, the Emperor Caligula wore pearl-embroidered

buskins, and even, as history relates, gave his favorite horse a collar of pearls. The story of Cleopatra's folly in dissolving in vinegar a pearl of great price, has been told for nineteen centuries, but as there are chemists who deny to vinegar strength sufficient to dissolve the gem, the anecdote may be relegated to the limbo of exploded stories.

That rainbow-flecked gem, the opal, next claims our attention. A compound of silica in the amorphous condition, and water, it is one of the most beautiful gems in existence. When held between the eye and the light it appears of a pale, milky-redish blue, but when seen by reflected light it displays all the colors of the rainbow in flakes or flashes. This jewel seems to be the only one, the flaws of which constitute its beauty, as its marvelous play of colors is thought to be occasioned by invisible fissures in the gem. Every one knows that when the stone is moved about, colors the most exquisite chase each other in rapid succession within it, and then it is that the opal appears to have actual life in its heart.

Strange to say, the flashes of color in this stone are always more marked on a warm day, and the knowledge that heat enhances the brilliancy of

the gem, makes the dealer hold it in his hand some time before offering it for inspection.

The Mexican opal loses its beauty when exposed to water, and Sir Walter Scott, in his novel, "Anne of Geierstein," dexterously avails himself of this fact in describing the opal which manifested such strange sympathy with all the moods of its beautiful owner, Hermione. When the fair Persian was animated, the opal adorning her tresses shot forth a spark or tongue of flame, but on that fatal day when the holy water fell thereon, "out from it leaped a brilliant spark like a falling star," and all its brightness and beauty departed. This gem, long looked upon with superstitious dread, is fast becoming as popular as it deserves, especially as it is the only stone that cannot be imitated.

The emerald has long held a leading rank in the world of precious stones, and is eminently worthy of the distinction. It crystallizes in hexagonal prisms, and is said to owe its green color to minute quantities of chromic acid which enters into its composition. This stone has also its historical connection. Nero, it is said, viewed the gladiatorial combats through an eyeglass of emerald, and Cortez, on presenting his bride with a splendid rose emerald, excited the envy of the Spanish queen, whereat he lost caste at court!

The term amethyst is applied to all violet or purple quartz crystals, though there are, strictly speaking, but two varieties. The oriental amethyst is really a violet sapphire, while that to which the term occidental is given, is merely quartz crystal colored with oxide of manganese; however, when perfect, it is of a rich hue resembling that of a purple grape. In past ages this stone was put to a beautiful use, that of engraving, the best specimens of which are afforded by the cameo "Mithridates," and the bust of Trajan.

The turquoise, blue as a fragment of a summer sky, is not without its admirers. Never occurring in the crystalline form, it is found rather in reniform masses, sometimes ranging in color from blue to pale green. In the middle ages it was well known and highly valued, and to few other stones were attributed so many virtues. Even to this day the proverb is said to be current in Russia: "A turquoise given with a loving hand, carries with it happiness and good fortune." This may be the cause of the extravagant grief to which Shylock abandons himself on discovering that his darling turquoise had been carried off by the wayward Jessica.

Despite the alluring sparkle of the other gems that plead for attention, we forego the pleasant

task of singing their praise. Enough has been said to account for their never-failing charm and for their figuring so conspicuously in human affairs. The sacred writers make frequent mention of gems and jewels; in fine, even the rapt St. John, in describing the surpassing splendor of the heavenly Jerusalem, introduces all the jewels that most delight the beauty-loving heart of man, until his word-picture becomes, so to speak, a dazzling mosaic of gems of purest ray.



## **BRANDS OF HUMOR**



## BRANDS OF HUMOR

SOME ONE, wise in his generation, calls laughter the salt of life. We so heartily endorse this sentiment that, if asked to match Sancho Panza's devout wish as to the inventor of sleep, we should say: blessings on the one who first invented laughter. To be consistent, this invocation must, of course, include those provokers of laughter, the fun-makers or humorists. And, in truth, they deserve that blessings should pursue and overtake them. They are benefactors of the race, quite as much as those who institute social reforms or invent labor-saving machines.

The dejected 'havior of the visage we all wot of, in Shakespeare and out of it, is a thing to be deplored. Yet such, as a rule, would be the gloomy outlook, had not nature hidden a germ of fun in the hearts of most of her children. Americans are, happily, not a phlegmatic race, but recognize that real mirth gives a flavor to life. And, indeed, true gaiety of heart, to its possessor, is equal to ten thousand a year in coin of the re-

public. It wins friends, often opens the magic portals of society, and pads over the rough places of life.

Nor, as some people suppose, is fun of the right kind diametrically opposed to piety. On the contrary, genuine merriment has its source in a heart at peace with God and the world, and a truly upright heart, as a rule, is a merry one. True, there have been good people in this world who bade adieu to hilarity early in their career, and thereafter looked upon life with rueful visages. But these are not the ones who lead us to better and higher things. Right or wrong, we turn from them to the cheery and gay-hearted, who help us bravely to front mishaps and defeat, to smile through our tears.

While making a plea for humor, it is not meant that one should set up for a professional joker, donning the cap and bells. Not at all. We believe it quite practical to walk in the serious paths of life, occasionally permitting the sunshine of humor to light up the shades thereof, resulting in something akin to the gray-gold of an April sky.

As regards the fun that, like a gay-colored thread, runs through the warp and woof of our literature, he must be a very Dry-as-dust who

would have it otherwise. That wisdom which comes to us in the shape of ponderous tomes, "bound in brass and wild boar's hide," we relegate to the limbo of the upper shelves of our libraries, while the sprightly book lies ready at our hand for frequent perusal.

He is an accomplished student of human nature who, by his writing, teaches, while he seems only to amuse, who has the skill to cajole us into accepting his knowledge and learning because it wears a smiling visage. To this class belong many of our men of letters. Irving, for example, threw upon the literary market a brand of humor eminently characteristic. It was at times placid even to gravity. But this gravity generally masked latent fun; and again, his humor often thinly veneered serious purpose.

As regards the first, the unwary reader was apt to take it for downright seriousness. But some little twist or turn of phrase, like the twinkle in the eye of the speaker, betrayed the fun underneath the grave literary manner, and the secret was out. In this half-serious, half-playful manner, Irving gave his message to the world. His most humorous sketches have a substratum of seriousness. The author himself pleads guilty to this, and admits that even in that artistic bit of

restrained humor, the "Stout Gentleman," the serious purpose was masquerading in the guise of fun.

If any one possessed the faculty of saying wise things in a sportive way, it was Holmes. This was no less evident in the easy pleasantry of much of his verse, than in his *ex-cathedra* utterances as presiding genius of his celebrated Breakfast Table. These *dicta* have a final, Rome-has-spoken air about them that bids defiance to question. The muse of Holmes was a foe to humbug, and his humor could be caustic when he wished to ridicule a false sentiment, custom or fashion out of existence. Shrewd observer that he was, he delighted to play with subjects, grave or gay, staid or whimsical, and the sparkle of his humor is hardly less charming to-day than when his oracular statements first won the public ear.

If one desires a specimen of genuine Yankee fun, he must seek it in the "Biglow Papers" of Lowell. Happy hits, covert humor and bits of pleasantry indigenous to the New England soil, veil his serious purpose of antagonism to war, slavery and pretended patriotism.

In Whitcomb Riley's dialect poems, we taste the peculiar flavor of the western humor. Droll-

ery, quaint conceits stamp it, and a freshness suggestive of the prairies where it is nurtured.

This is the kind of book one finishes reading with something very like a sigh that the author did not choose to make it longer. Why? Because it exorcises low spirits and puts us in good humor with our kind. Like Sheridan's comedy of "The Rivals," it comes to us freighted with genuine, hearty fun; and so, for the greatest good to the greatest number we devoutly hope such books will increase and multiply.



## TABLE TALK



## TABLE TALK

THAT novel in verse, "Lucile," once so much in the vogue with sentimental young misses, contains a few practical lines touching on the one thing necessary from a physical point of view —the inevitable necessity of dining. Says the poet:

"We may live without love; what is passion but pining?  
But where is the man who can live without dining?"

Needless to say, the man has not yet been found.

The fashion of dining is an old one—one that came in with Adam, and shows no sign of losing favor with the multitude. Granted then that people must meet around the social board, why not make the meeting a pleasant one, be that meeting under the family roof-tree or around the shining mahogany of a friend.

"That sounds very well in theory," says some one, "but to make practical application of it at the first meal of the day, for instance, it is quite another matter." Yes, one must admit that the

breakfast hour is a severe test of the amiability of the average man or woman. We were up late the night previous, our sleep was broken, or we yielded to the temptation to indulge in a morning nap. Resultant of forces: a hasty toilet, ruffled temper, disposition to maintain a dignified (?) silence, or to indulge only in monosyllables, and a general inclination to view the world through blue glasses. No chance for conversation there. Each one seems to think of the labors ahead, during the course of the day, and keeps his or her energy in reserve.

But the dinner table—that is the place to which in addition to a healthy appetite we ought to bring our best smiles, our neatest, prettiest toilets. Nor is this all. What about the feast of reason and the flow of soul? Evidently, if there is to be any such feasting or soul-flowing, those who gather around the board must bring the requisites with them. In the home circle this can be made the happiest hour of the day. And if one dines abroad, who would not prefer an agreeable neighbor, one who has opinions of his own—they need not be aggressive ones—one who, if not witty himself, is at least appreciative of that quality in others? Contrast such a person with one whose only contribution to the chit-chat of the dinner-

table is "yes" or "no," or, worse still, who insists upon your mounting the witness stand and subjecting you to a fire of cross-questions. But comparisons are under the ban.

Those especially who plunge into the social vortex feel the need of cultivating the conversational powers. The presence of a few good talkers at a dinner table has often lifted the feast from the regions of flat failure to the airy heights of success, and won the undying gratitude of the hostess. Other things being equal, your brilliant conversationalist is welcomed everywhere. Doors the most aristocratic fly open at his approach, and when the club gives a dinner to honor the man who has made a stir in the world of art or letters, he is sure to be bidden to the feast.

Conversation is a necessity. By the contact of mind with mind is the intellectual spark produced. Thoughts that seldom leap out to meet the thoughts of another through the medium of language, in the end work mental harm. Similar to the lightning rod, conversation draws off the superfluous mental electricity and the mind is all the clearer therefor.

Postprandial wit, or the lack of it, has left its mark upon literature. Who does not pity Pope, compelled to sit silent, among less gifted, but more

talkative companions? I dare say, he would often have been willing to barter his power to draw for that thousand pounds upon the bank of fine language for a little of the small change of nimble-witted conversational ability. Doubtless blundering Goldsmith derived scant comfort from the knowledge that he "wrote like an angel," when, surrounded by the keen minds of that London literary club, he found himself talking like "poor Poll."

If ever there was an autocrat of the dinner-table, that man was Doctor Johnson. The best minds of his day paid him homage, and well they might. He seems always to have had his hand upon his conversational sword, ready to whip it out for a fencing match, and never so content as when he met a foeman worthy of his steel. It is safe to say that no man was better equipped for intellectual sword-play. A powerful understanding, marvelous memory, and wide reading were his leading assets. His work of dictionary-making stood him in good stead in these intellectual bouts, and he could pick and choose from the array of words that came thronging to respond to his thought.

The conversational powers of Irving were apt to play him false when he found himself among

comparative strangers. His friend Moore hit off the situation in a few words, when the latter made this journal note: "Took Irving to the dinner at Elwyn's, but he did not open his mouth. Not strong as a lion, but delightful as a domestic animal." Concerning the poet Rogers, Irving himself dwells upon the delight of a *tête-à-tête* conversation with him over the breakfast table. In a word he seems to have reduced table-talk to a fine art, in which he had perfected himself to the last degree.

In the *Aeneid* we read that among the good things for which Æolus acknowledges his indebtedness to Juno, was the privilege of reclining at the feast of the gods. But even this should pale before the pleasure of listening to the rhetorical flourishes, the keen logic and the sparkling repartee of gifted talkers when encircling the social board. Are they to be imitated? From afar, perhaps. Every one cannot hope to rival Sidney Smith or Madame de Staël, but each one can do his or her share to make the daily dinner-table meetings, feasts, not for the bodily well being only, but also for that of the mind.



**THE LETTER IS THE MAN**



## THE LETTER IS THE MAN

**B**UFFON'S well-known saying, "the style is the man," has come to be regarded as a sort of literary axiom, as little questioned as those of logic or mathematics. To speak in a general way, a writer's characteristics are mirrored in his style as stars in a placid lake, but if we would read his very soul, we must turn to his letters of friendship. As the sonnet unlocked the heart of Shakespeare, so do letters exchanged between friends throw open the door to the inner shrine of their respective natures, until one might say: Let me read the letters of the man and I will tell you what he is.

We hear much nowadays concerning human documents, but it would seem that nothing has so great a claim upon the title as this frank interchange of thought between friend and friend. True, an author's poems give us his mental altitude, in phrases that caress the ear and win the understanding; his novel—if it be a masterpiece of character painting or cunningly contrived as to

plot—fascinates after its kind; the volume of essays, sparkling as frost in moonlight, dazzles us into admiration of the art that conceals art, and yet when all is told, it is to his letters that we turn, if we would know the spontaneous outpourings of his heart.

Paradoxical as it may seem, it is only when a great man dies that many in the circle of his admirers come to know him. Denied by fate or adverse circumstances the privilege of his acquaintance, they find pleasure, even though it be touched with sadness, in perusing these soul-revelations. Thus, whether they are our contemporaries, owing allegiance to the same flag, or born in another age and clime, we may come to know them at their best. Michael Angelo, the matchless sculptor, calling forth from the pale marble a *Moses* or a *David*, may awe us by his power, but we feel that after all he was cast in a mold similar to less gifted beings, when we read his letters to his father and his friends.

And there is that well-nigh forgotten writer, Gerald Griffin, who, as he humorously tells us, went up to London fired with the ambition of rivaling Scott and throwing Shakespeare into the shade. What of him? Just this: that his epistles respond to the test of repeated perusals; that they

possess a perennial charm, stealing into our darker musings with a gaiety that exorcises the spirit of sadness. They are the outpourings of a nature sound to the core, whose cheerfulness bubbled up over the pages of his letters; the latter dashed now and then with a faint melancholy, proving his kinship with those who dwell upon the lonely heights of genius.

Among a hundred rare bits, let me quote this: "Do not be hurt at any time by my telling you the truth. It is the part of a friend to do so, and the friendship which the touch of truth dissolves can only have been linked by falsehood." Again is the letter the man.

The name of Irving is one to conjure with. At its mention, up from the haunts of Sleepy Hollow rise strange beings, with Rip Van Winkle—his twenty years' nap over—in the lead; Goldsmith comes arrayed in the bravery of his plum-colored suit, and with him, the Moorish magic that haunts the halls of the Alhambra. Yet despite the charms of all this, we turn with added delight to the letters in which he laid bare his heart to his friends. And this is the Irving that we love.

In the volumes, "Among My Books," and "My Study Window," we discover the dignified Harvard Professor. If we would find the real Lowell,

the man of the domestic hearth, the boon companion, and the honest hater of shams, we must seek him in his letters. And there genuine Yankee fun jostles ripe wisdom and an acute observation of men and things.

Some years ago, to the admirers of that gentlest and noblest of geniuses—Edwin Booth—came, in book form, the letters penned by him to the daughter and friends he so loved. And rare reading they are. Those who came under the thrall of his dramatic genius, could not but be touched; but without these letters they would never guess the greatness and depth of his nature, its tenderness and simplicity, its charm and lovable qualities.

But are not characters of an opposite nature disclosed by similar means? It could hardly be otherwise. He who lives for self, who stoops to petty spite, who is steeled to the heart-aches of others, under like circumstances, just as surely lays bare the fact, and writes, one might say, a chapter in self-revelation.

## **CHARACTER REQUISITES**



## CHARACTER REQUISITES

**H**OWEVER much your cynic may rail at a world grown gray in folly he must admit that it is, withal, a pretty just one, prone, in the long run, to set their proper value upon men and things. Observe its tactics. Some valiant knight of the quill, with flourish of trumpets, enters the lists to dispute, let us say, the prize of poesy. Hardly have the plaudits that hailed his entrance died away ere he is unhorsed by that bluff old rider, the world, and forthwith retires crestfallen from the field.

The world is especially a shrewd judge of character. Awaiting developments, for a time it stands, so to speak, quietly by, wearing an abstracted air, yet all the while taking an inventory, mental and moral, of the candidate's equipment, ready, if he be found wanting, to order him to the right-about. As a rule, its pronouncements are accepted without cavil, whether it says this is base metal, that has a false ring, or this is of sterling worth.

As regards the work of character building, it

is a matter which comes home to every one, and one which the student, in the formative period of his existence, cannot take too seriously. Possessed of a high character, when he closes his school books for the last time, he goes forth, ready, if need be, to breast the blows of unhappy circumstances. Without it, what would he be but "a thing of shreds and patches."

All the world knows that the indispensable requisites of an upright character, first, last, and all the time, are truth and honor. Kindliness, courtesy, and their kindred virtues are, of course, to be cultivated. They help to pad over the rough places of life, but honor and truth should be the pole stars of existence. Lovelace, on the eve of departure to the wars, replies to the reproachful Lucastra:

"I could not love thee dear, so much,  
Loved I not honor more,"

and a lengthy dissertation is epitomized therein.

It is this nice sense of honor that makes its possessor a marked man. His word is his bond. Men feel that in their relations with him they need not be on their guard against artifice. Fair dealing is his motto, and his conduct squares with it. On the other hand, a certain stigma attaches

to the individual or nation known to be untrustworthy. When Virgil made Laocoön say that he feared the Greeks even bearing gifts, he no doubt voiced the sentiments of many a nation, once sufferers from Grecian perfidy.

It is true that while the world is willing to sit at the feet of the Greeks to be taught a knowledge and love of esthetics, it looks elsewhere for the noblest types of manhood and womanhood. Of such a character, the fiber, nay, the very life blood, is truthfulness. Though he be without money in his purse, his culture small, his abilities slender, such is his moral force that he gains the respect and esteem of all, save, perhaps, the false and the base.

When his country had fallen upon evil days, it was Lincoln's proved integrity that caught the popular heart and called him to shape the destinies of a great nation. Another proof, that while mind-force, brilliant gifts, and social success are valued by the world, it is to the character of rugged rectitude that it pins its faith.

Nor does it surprise us to find that qualities whose worth is so universally admitted should have engaged the pen of genius. Poets have attained their highest flights when truth or honor was their theme, and the greatest artists in noble prose have given of their best to add volume to

the general chorus rising in its praise from the hearts of men. Among the latest utterances on this head, we find in a volume of essays newly given to the public: "Love of truth is the basis of character. To be truthful and honorable are the most difficult of virtues, for truth and honor spring from the finest sense of duty of which the soul is capable."

But not from a shrewd eye to the loaves and fishes of life should honesty be cultivated. Rather than that, better in the face of crushing defeat, be able to say with Francis I. at Pavia, "All is lost save honor." For there is a failure which is success, a failure in which the vanquished goes down to "dusty death" wearing the white flower of honor and truth,

**BE NATURAL**



## BE NATURAL

**I**N one of his immortal conversations with Boswell, said Dr. Johnson, assuming his most oracular manner, "Sir, there is in mankind a disposition to make people stare," and, remembering Johnson's polysyllabics, every student of the great biography is ready to exclaim: Verily, the gruff old moralist knew whereof he spoke!

Behold him in the company of the courtly Beauclerk, Langton the genial, the stately Burke, "poor Goldsmith," Sir Joshua Reynolds and the irrepressible Boswell. As he measures out his wisdom in words of sesquipedalian length, not to gazing rustics, but to these urban gentlemen, he best illustrates his own dictum.

Of a truth, this desire to make the world stand at gaze, comes to the surface in various shapes. Let us consider it as it crops out in the form of affectation. This foible, to put it as mildly as possible, is not far to seek. The other evening, at Mrs. Algernon Jones' reception, you met the guest in whose name the company was gathered to-

gether. Dropping into conversation with her, at once it became evident that the lady was playing a part. Forced intonations, a prodigious rolling of the r's or a merciless sacrifice of them, an exaggerated broadening of certain vowels, and, in general, a mouthing of words, achieved a result that on the very face of it bore the stamp of affectation.

And the sum total of the impression produced? Pity, not unmingled with a mild contempt. Yet Mrs. Algernon Jones' guest is typical of a class whose members would fain pose as superior beings.

To go to the root of the matter, what does it imply? Those who look beneath the surface of things see in the assumption of fantastic tones and pronunciations an effort to hide mediocrities or deficiencies in the character or training of the individual. Another who has studied from the life describes it as a sort of dust-throwing whereby the vision of the onlooker may, in a sense, be blinded to the real state of affairs.

Viewing the matter from another standpoint, it seems to be a self-imposed tribute of the mediocre nature to the ideal. Comparing himself with the standard of excellence and becoming painfully conscious of his deficiencies, he seeks a short cut to his ideal, achieving nothing but an affected

manner, offensive to all whose good opinion is worth having. And the game after all is not worth the candle, for while it may make the unskilful stare, it cannot but make the judicious grieve. Catch the affected person off his guard, posing, so to speak, is thrown to the winds, and the natural man stands revealed. An immense outlay for ridiculously meager returns!

Is the affected person sincere, is a pertinent question. Some there are who do not hesitate to say that affectation and sincerity have, in chemical language, no affinity for each other—that the presence of one excludes the other. Be this as it may, would simplicity or affectation prove the open sesame to your confidence? Upon which would you lean in a crisis, or which would you prefer in a bosom friend?

Again in the company of the affected, the true-hearted cannot get on. For what is the charm of society if not the meeting on common ground of cultured minds and kindred spirits who give to each other of their best, who are simple, natural, sincere? In the conversation of the really great, affectation finds no place. It should not excite surprise then, that a really noble nature, unstinted as to mental gifts, sincere and unaffected, should find easy access to the inner sanctuary of every

heart. Given such a state of affairs, and this result must follow as the night the day.

The poet touches the great world-heart, not by his florid rhetoric, his nicely balanced sentences, but by his skill in using the electric current of natural feeling which proclaims the whole race kin. Simplicity and sincerity are the twin requisites of truly great work. The biographer of Garrick tells of the rivalry existing between that actor and his fellow-tragedian, Barry, as regards their rendition of the rôle of *Lear*. Each had his warm partisans, and discussion ran high as to their comparative merits until some one struck at the heart of the matter in these lines:

“The town has found out different ways  
To praise the different *Lears*;  
For Barry they have loud applause,  
For Garrick—only tears.”

Yes, the world over, simplicity and sincerity are, in the long run, winning cards. They, like charity, make amends for a score of short-comings, and when to them are added great mental gifts the combination is irresistible.

Verily, in such a presence affectation must needs hide her diminished head.

## **SPRINGS OF EMOTION**



## SPRINGS OF EMOTION

**H**EIGH-HO! for childhood and early youth! Then our hearts were like so many wind-harps stirred by each faint breath of emotion. Then our laughter rang true. We were gay, we knew not why, if not from very joy of living. Wordsworth was right when he said that heaven is very near us in our childhood. But as the years, like birds on the wing, speed away to join the irrevocable past, we realize that a glory has indeed passed from the earth.

And with this glory, in too many instances, flies the heart's young gaiety. Less and less do we thrill under the old spells. At length we come to pose as cynics, in whose hearts the fountains of emotion no longer play. But is this doing ourselves strict justice? Are we really as hard-hearted as we appear?

I think not. A thousand subtle causes, like descending angels, may still have power to move the waters of our hearts and give them the healing virtue of emotion.

I kneel at Benediction with a throng of silent worshipers. No fervor melts the ice of my heart. Suddenly the solemn hush is broken by the pleading notes of a hymn new to me. No vocal pyrotechnics are here. The soprano keeps modestly to the medium notes, and the alto—a clinging shadow—moves with it. Gradually, some subtle spell, I know not what, falls upon me. The ice round my heart is melted. Its waters are stirred by the angel of song, and I taste the joy of loving contrition.

There is a sweet sadness that steals over the heart, when, after a long absence, the exile looks again upon scenes familiar and dear to his childish eyes. Nor need the landscape that evokes this feeling be such as to tempt the brush of the artist. Let it be that associated with the halcyon days of youth, and the eye lingers upon it with the fond gaze of a lover, looking through a mist of tears.

Again, the chances of life often throw together types of character in tastes, in sympathies, as wide as the poles asunder. People who serve in the ranks with us there are, whose ways are not our ways, who love what we shrink from, and who spurn what we fondly clasp to our hearts. In the flush of health, in the pride of life, we will have none of them.

But time passes. We look again, perhaps upon the faces of those with whom, long ago, we had agreed to disagree. The light in their eyes burns low. In their depths sorrow sits on brood. The cheeks have lost their beauty-curves, and, in some unaccountable way, their wan faces become a keen reproach. Straightway, sympathy storms and wins the citadels of our hearts. God touches them with his grace of kindness. To the winds we cast our petty differences, and we give to them the warm hand-clasp of friendship.

In the world of emotion, the poet, to be worthy of that high name, must reign supreme. He moves his readers in proportion as he is moved himself. This is the animating spirit of those snatches of song that refuse to be forgotten, perennially stirring the heart.

Expressions there are, which, occurring in verse, seem to lift it from the level of the commonplace into the region of the poetic. Haunting phrases like "no more," suggestive and reminiscent to some minds, have in them a touch of indefinable sadness that pierces while it soothes the heart.

Nor is this all. A mother looking with patient sorrow upon a wayward son; decrepit age lingering in forlorn helplessness upon life's highway; the break in the orator's voice, an affront to a

friend;—all sweep, like the touch of strong fingers across the chords of our hearts, until they vibrate with pity, tremble with indignation, or thrill with love.

Far fall the day when such appeals to human tenderness meet no response. But they must and will meet with response in every noble nature, “until the heart itself be cold in Lethe’s pool.”

## HOROSCOPES VERSUS TELESCOPES



## HOROSCOPES VERSUS TELESCOPES

“Our little systems have their day,  
They have their day and cease to be;  
They are but broken lights of Thee,  
And Thou, O Lord, art more than they.”

**A** STROLOGY is a dame of long descent. She traces her pedigree far back to the ages when shepherds watched their flocks upon the Chaldean plains. Gazing continually upon the open volumes of the starry heavens, these simple folk began to read therefrom a mysterious meaning connected with the affairs of men and nations. Gradually the constellations that wreath the heavens as with flowers of living light came to be invested with an influence upon terrestrial affairs, giving rise to what is known as judicial and natural astrology.

Judicial astrology taught that at the birth of each individual his destiny was fixed, and in the case of one who was to play an important part in life, to herald the event some blazing comet or new star would appear in the celestial blue,

That this belief was current in the days of Shakespeare is evident from the words which he puts upon the lips of Glendower, who says:

“At my nativity  
The front of heaven was full of fiery shapes  
Of burning cressets ; know, that at my birth,  
The frame and huge foundation of the world  
Shook like a coward.”

Soon it became the fashion to cast the horoscope—as it was called—of royalty, or of those the circumstances of whose lives seemed to promise remarkable developments. In finding the fate of an individual or undertaking, the method usually followed—we are told—was to draw a horoscope representing the portion of the stars or planets either in the whole heaven, or one degree above the eastern horizon at the time of the birth of the person or the beginning of the enterprise. The celestial sphere was divided into twelve parts called “houses.” The first, called the ascendant house, was regarded as the house of life, and the planets located therein at the moment of birth were popularly supposed to have the most potent influence on the life and destiny of the individual.

To the other divisions were given such names as the houses of kindred, riches, love, death,

friends, and enemies. Arbitrary significations were assigned to the different heavenly bodies, as they appeared singly or in conjunction, and according to these significations was the horoscope interpreted. Thus faith in stellar influences became so widespread that the astrologer was looked upon as a seer, and effectually ruled in camp and court. This was especially true of the Middle Ages, though the star-reader plied his trade long before the Christian era.

That astrology was practiced among the Romans, even under the empire, there is abundant proof. The story is told that when the wily and suspicious Tiberius wore the purple, the skill of the astrologer, Thrasyllus, was tested by that monarch's suddenly asking him if he had calculated how long he himself had to live. But the crafty astrologer, divining his master's intention, after examining the aspect of the stars, with well-feigned terror declared that "the present hour was for him critical and perhaps fatal," which reply saved his life and strengthened the faith of the imperial dupe in his pretended power to read the stars.

Another instance of its dominion over royal minds is furnished by that prince of shrewdness and subtlety, Louis XI of France. Scott, whose

wizard pen touched few subjects without rendering them enchanting—in *Quentin Durward*,—makes the leading events of the story turn upon the predictions of Louis' court astrologer, Galeotti. That the astute Louis, credited by historians with marvelous skill in reading men's hearts, could fall so easy a prey to the trickery of Galeotti, only proves anew that all men have their vulnerable parts, though, unlike Achilles, in this case, it seems to have been located in the head rather than in the heel. How the astrologer escaped the dangling noose when the wrath of his royal master burst upon his head is quaintly told by Scott, who makes him reply to that monarch's question as to the hour of the astrologer's death by saying that it would precede that of his majesty by twenty-four hours!

Like all subjects of dispute, astrology, even in the height of its popularity, had its advocates and opponents. Cicero opposed it with skill and eloquence, quoting as arguments against it the untimely death of Cæsar, of Pompey, and of Crassus, whom the Chaldean astrologers had predicted would die at home, in age, peace and honor.

The reference to this art in the plays of Shakespeare would seem to indicate that he was no believer in the pretended powers of the astrolo-

gers. Witness Harry Hotspur's irreverent reply to the boasting Glendower, or, in *King Lear*, Edmund's soliloquy, in which he calls the science of the stars "foppery of the world that when we are sick in fortune we make guilty of our disasters the sun, moon, and the stars."

The lean, plotting Cassius was evidently no believer, since he declared to Brutus that the fault is not in our stars but in ourselves that we are underlings. Napoleon, man of destiny, believed in his propitious star, and it was perhaps this belief that gave him the appearance of courting death, leading him on one occasion to say, "The bullet that is to kill me is not yet cast."

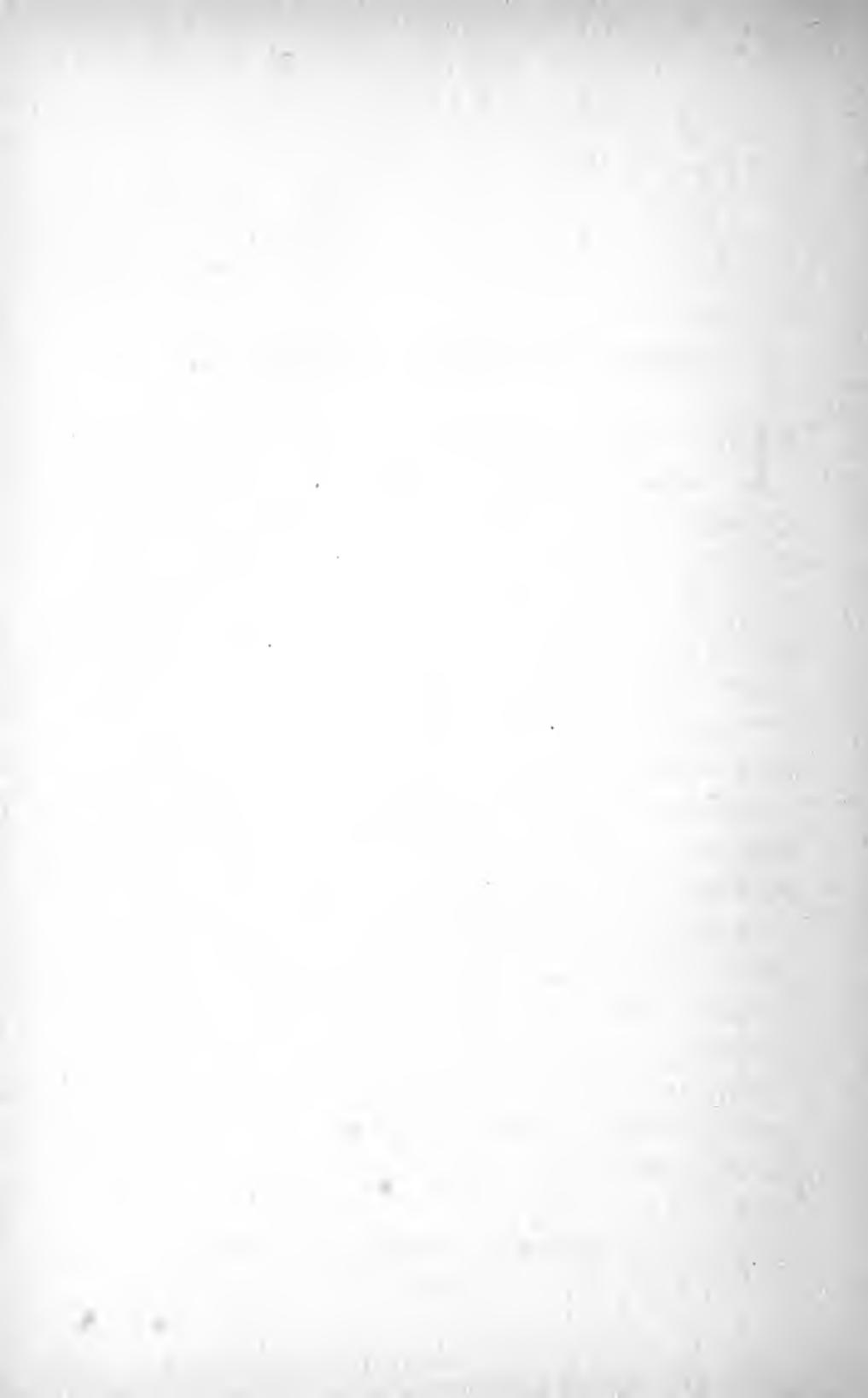
But in a happy hour Galileo invented the telescope, and this, with the general establishment of the Copernican system, gave the deathblow to astrology. However, though the science is dead, it still seems to live on in our language. It gleams in the writings of the early poets, notably those of Milton, who makes continual references to the planetary influences. In ordinary conversation it crops out occasionally, as when we say "Thanks to my lucky star," or "His star is in the ascendant," or when we speak of a person as of a mercurial, saturnine, or jovial temperament. Gradually astrology came to be totally and forever eclipsed

by her daughter, astronomy, and divination by the stars fell into the same category with palmistry and fortune-telling by cards.

Thus, while the star-gazers of the past employed themselves in assigning strange meanings to the orbs whose mysterious flashings seemed to speak of good or evil fortune, those of to-day build observatories at the summits of lofty mountains, from which to sweep the heavens with their telescopes, content if they are able to shed a few rays of true knowledge upon the minds of men.

Yet the astrologers, like the alchemists, builded better than they knew, for, as so many precursors, they prepared the way for the most sublime of all sciences—astronomy. We at least have no reason to regret that, as in Othello's case, their occupation is gone, or that the horoscope has given way to the telescope.

WHEN ALCHEMY WAS KING



## WHEN ALCHEMY WAS KING

THE story of the rise, decline and fall of this dethroned monarch of mediæval minds abounds in elements at once marvelous and picturesque. Phases of its history read, one might say, like chapters from the "Arabian Nights," and in fact much of its literature might be classed under the head of romance. In other words, to precipitate the hard facts from this solution of false premises, magic and modicum of truth, is a task hardly to be performed in the limits of a brief sketch. Let us, then, merely touch upon the leading points in the case.

Around the word alchemy itself there clings a peculiar atmosphere, the mere mention of which conjures up visions of gloomy, smoke-clouded laboratories, with all the paraphernalia of the "black art"; wicked looking crucibles, ugly retorts and yawning furnaces fairly challenge suspicion, an effect perceptibly heightened by the presiding genius of the place.

Before we proceed to exorcise these ghosts of

the past, let us see if they had any reason for existing. Upon investigation we learn that for more than ten centuries, devotees of this "sacred art," as it was called, labored incessantly over these same retorts and crucibles, daunted neither by repeated failures nor the sword of state suspended over their heads. As every one knows, their object was two-fold: to transmute the baser metals into the nobler, and to distill an elixir, a draught of which would cure all diseases and prolong life indefinitely. The school-girl of this electrically enlightened century, having read her textbook on chemistry, would smile at such a chimera; but be it remembered, it is a far cry from the present time to the early and middle ages of our era.

The belief in the theory of the transmutation of metals arose from the opinions of the ancients, notably Plato and Aristotle, in regard to the constitution of matter. They held that there were but four elements: earth, air, fire, and water, which were continually changing into one another, and on this the alchemists built their hope of success in dealing with the base metals. By common consent, Egypt is regarded as the birthplace of alchemy. There, through the misinterpretation of the receipts of early Egyptian metal workers, together with the four-element theory, the

doctrine of transmutation of metals grew and flourished, whence its seeds were wafted over the sea to Spain, thence gradually spreading throughout Europe.

Then, as now, the gold fever swayed men's thoughts, but, unlike those of the modern gold hunter, their mines lay at the bottom of their crucibles. To **Hermes of Egypt** is given the title, father of alchemy, and to him are attributed the thirteen precepts concerning the making of gold, said to be inscribed upon the celebrated emerald slab. So mysterious is its phraseology—a characteristic of most alchemical literature—that the ordinary reader is left completely in the dark as to its meaning, and is forced to conclude that it must have been a perusal of this table which led a modern cynic to declare that language was given man to conceal his thoughts.

From what can be gathered on the subject, many alchemists looked upon metals as compounds of sulphur and mercury; others held the rather poetic notion that gold was in reality condensed sunbeams. The so-called "water of sulphur" seems to have figured conspicuously in what was known as the transmutation of metals, and "this water, acting like a leaven, was supposed to change into its resemblance the substance to be dyed."

Thus, while some wasted their energies seeking for the philosopher's stone, others, with equal folly, burned the candle of life at both ends in vain efforts to concoct the elixir of life.

To realize the strange tenacity with which the theory fastened itself upon the mind, one has only to glance at the pages of Hawthorne's "Septimus Felton." Weird and uncanny, the tale throws a gruesome spell over the reader as he follows the dreamer, Felton, in his passionate musings on the brevity of life and his utter absorption in preparing the elixir that shall set death at defiance. One lays aside the book with a desire to hasten into the open air, to mingle with his companions, to enjoy the bitter-sweets of life, with death at the end of the vista called three-score years and ten.

The question arises: Were the alchemists in good faith? There can be no doubt that a large class of these zealous workers honestly believed that the yellow alloys which they turned out of their crucibles were masses of genuine gold, yet it is equally true that the knavish alchemist existed, who, though perceiving that his attempts were futile, did not hesitate to dupe the credulous and wheedle them out of their fortunes in return for a recipe for making gold and silver.

Besides the typical alchemist which the novelist

is fond of describing, there are others whose names do honor to the art. Heading the list of European alchemists we find the name of Albertus Magnus, who was in addition a profound theologian, scholar and astronomer. While making progress in the arts, he doubted the possibility of transmutation, and, in effect, warned the avaricious princes—who wished to replenish the state coffers quickly and easily—that philosopher's gold was but glittering tinsel. His pupil, St. Thomas Aquinas, studied and experimented in the art and even wrote a book on the subject, while Roger Bacon possessed himself of so many of the open secrets of nature as to bring upon himself the charge of being a magician. Another phase of the matter presents itself in the fact that even physicians of that day regarded gold as the most perfect of medicines, which suggests the thought that the modern bichloride-of-gold treatment may be an indirect descendant of that theory.

But the reign of alchemy finally came to an end. As knowledge increased and methods of analysis became more accurate, the metals began to take rank as elements, and gradually the theory that had so long dazzled men's minds faded, the dreamers awoke from their delusions, and alchemy was succeeded by chemistry. As to ourselves, who

have inherited the results of the alchemist's labor, it would seem that modesty best becomes us. For though we have solidified gases, though we know what fuel supplies the fires of the sun, and have caught and tamed electricity—for all this alchemy paved the way, and though it be now dethroned, its descendant, chemistry, lives and reigns. Verily, the king is dead; long live the king!

## CELESTIAL MESSENGERS



## CELESTIAL MESSENGERS

IN studying the literature of the heavenly bodies, one cannot fail to note the patient research that marks the labors of the astronomers in their efforts to wrest their secrets from the skies. After devoting years to the establishing of some theory to which they pinned their scientific faith, in the flashlight of a new fact they find it untenable; then wiser, and, mayhap, sadder, they again look about for some key to the mystery that lies hidden in that great cipher—the starry heavens.

The problem of the origin of the various meteoric phenomena is a case in point. As year after year the dizzy earth whirls through space in obedience to the silent mandate of its lord and master, the sun, portions of its path are illuminated by pyrotechnic displays, in brilliancy far exceeding those devised by the ingenuity of man. To this wonderful exhibition of celestial fireworks astronomers have given the name, star-shower, a term not, indeed, a misnomer to those who have seen the August and November downpour of meteoric fire.

These star-like bodies, as swift as they are fleet-ing, dart noiselessly through the sky, followed by a bright train, a sight familiar enough to any one, who, on a clear, moonless night, has fixed a steady gaze upon some particular quarter of the heavens. Startling as it is for the moment to see a star fall, as it is popularly termed, how much greater the amazement to have been witness of those wonder-ful meteoric showers recorded in the literature of the science! Then, apparently, all the stars in the heavens seemed to have slipped their moor-ings, and, darting hither and thither, thick as snowflakes in a snowstorm, presented the sublime spectacle of a shower of fire.

Whence come these bodies and what are they, is a question that has been variously answered. Those upon the watch-towers of science assert that these periodic displays are due to the fact that the earth's orbit cuts that of a comet, and that the fragments into which the comet has been divided furnish the material for these pyrotechnics. These bodies, it is said, flying through space with an immense velocity, by the resistance they meet in penetrating our atmosphere, develop sufficient heat to inflame them, hence the phenomena of star showers and shooting stars.

Other messengers there are from the distant re-

gions of space, some of which, in their rapid flight across the sky seem to resemble balls of fire, often sufficiently brilliant to light up the entire landscape. In many cases, after they are lost to view, a loud detonation is heard, followed by a fall of stones, and to the latter, science has given the name meteorites.

As to their composition it may be said that though by far the greater number are mineral, yet a few are masses of nearly pure iron, more or less alloyed with nickel, cobalt and other metals. In these, though subjected to the severest chemical tests, experimenters have failed to find any new element, though twenty-four of these already known have responded to the tests. As a rule, meteorites are covered with a thin black coating, sometimes having a bright surface, others being of a lusterless black. To account for their fiery appearance as they dart across the sky one has only to remember that by the resistance they meet from the air, intense heat is developed which melts the exterior of the stone and produces great light.

Those elements, gaseous and metallic, that play the most conspicuous parts in the economy of terrestrial life are found in the make-up of meteorites, thus justifying the belief that the individual worlds and fragments of them forming the uni-

verse, are similarly constituted. The strong family likeness and similar chemical composition of meteorites that have fallen in widely different parts of the earth seem to speak in no uncertain accents of a common origin.

The theory which traces their source to formerly active lunar volcanoes and entertained by so great an astronomer as Laplace, is, in an article appearing in *Astronomy and Astro-physics*, well propped up by what seems to be sound mathematical reasoning. If astronomers ever succeed in bringing this theory from the region of hypothesis to that of certainty, what food for speculation lies in the fact!

What poet, to whom references to the gentle moon have from time immemorial formed part of his stock in trade, would ever suspect that in the heyday of its lunar youth fires so fierce burned in its breast? And yet in all seriousness the theory is a plausible one. The merest tyro in the science of the heavens knows that the moon's surface, as presented to terrestrial gazers, is almost honey-combed by the craters of extinct volcanoes. Ages ago, then, when creation was young, many a giant Vesuvius must have blackened the face of the heavens with its mighty belchings.

Thus these bodies, sent in so summary a man-

ner from the burning heart of the now placid moon, have since been wandering in eccentric paths through space, until, moth-like, they are caught by the earth's attraction, and, after ages of devious wandering, finally come to rest upon its surface. Verily there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of, not only in Horatio's philosophy but also in that of most modern astronomers !



# **MOTHER EARTH**



## MOTHER EARTH

**P**HYSIOGNOMISTS tell us that the human countenance is a book upon which the pens of thought and emotion are ever at work, and that if we could but read it, every individual carries his life-history in his face. Puzzling as the record may sometimes be, yet, in the main, it is written in a language that may be easily translated by the aid of the notes and dictionary furnished by each one's heart and conscience.

A parallel case is that of Mother Earth. Her biography also has been written up to date and the great series of stratified rocks form the pages of a volume, to geologists, fascinating as a novel. As the world knows, it required no long perusal of this book of nature to convince the wise old savants that the paltry six thousand years—so long believed to be the age of the earth—must be abandoned for a number startlingly great.

To justify themselves against the outcry of those who saw in it a conflict with the Mosaic teachings, the geologists were obliged to appeal

to the forces of nature under daily observation. Thus was it shown through the testimony of rivers, rainfalls and ocean tides that by the process of erosion and disintegration, mountains and river-beds are continually parting with their substance, and—the second member of the equation being equal to the first—that corresponding deposits are being as ceaselessly formed elsewhere. Hence we may conclude that water is the main agent in the process of the destroying and building up of rocks.

Thus it may be said that the vast mountain ranges which traverse our earth have, in the course of long ages, lifted themselves Triton-like from the blue depths of the ocean, to which fact their ripple marks and numberless shells bear witness.

The student of geology knows that the greatest thickness of stratified rocks is about one hundred thousand feet; hence the chief labor confronting him who would know the age of the world, is the reduction of feet to years. Though bristling with difficulties, the task has been undertaken and the result has not been without some degree of success. In the first place, careful calculations have been made as to the average proportion of sediment contained in certain rivers of both hemispheres. This, together with the large amount of

detritus carried along by the current, forms the data from which approximate estimates have been made as to the amount of soil removed yearly from the area over which the rivers flow. This being deposited upon the beds of oceans and on sea-shores, lays the foundation for future continents.

Taking the Mississippi rate of denudation, which, according to the estimate, removes one six-thousandth of a foot yearly, it follows that to remove one foot it would require six thousand years. To apply this rate of erosion and rock-building to the one hundred thousand feet of stratified rock is to lead to a figure so large as to shake the faith of the ordinary inquirer in geological results. And yet, in taking the six hundred million years as the period of geological time, though certain scientists think this number too large, others calmly tell us that it is too small!

That it is a problem difficult of solution even the most sanguine must admit, and while the labors of geologists must result in a nearer approach to the truth as to the exact age of Mother Earth yet she will continue to be—if we may so speak—“a lady of uncertain age.”

But what an interesting biography, that of our globe! The illuminated tomes of mediæval manuscripts around whose margins crept graceful vines

and from which "tropic birds took flight" are completely eclipsed by those of nature's illumining. The delicate fronds of the fern family have left their impress upon many a rocky page; diamonds deeply imbedded veil their fires in the sandy folds of others and summer showers are here recorded in the dimpled rocks. Day after day will the wind and water continue to write this history, and *finis* will be inscribed upon it only when

"The great globe itself,  
Yea, all that it inherit shall dissolve,  
And like an unsubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind."

PICTURES IN GLASS



## PICTURES IN GLASS

THOSE who are keenly alive to color effects need not be informed of the pleasure to be derived from watching the sunlight sifting through the stained glass windows of a church. To one sitting in our own chapel just as the lingering dusk of night flees before the dawn, the scene is unique and beautiful. As the first beams shine through the eastern window, silently upon the opposite wall plays a bar of violet light, melting gradually into faint rose-red and near which is visible just the ghost of a pale green. Now it steals onward until it falls upon the mural pillars, investing them with a short-lived glory. But upon the capitals especially do these colors play with finest effect. To their beauty of form, with their graceful tangle of acanthus leaves and flowing outlines, another charm is added, and for a moment the flattered sense is cheated into the belief that it beholds capitals carved from the solid amethyst, cut from the warm, glowing heart of an immense ruby, or chiseled with cunning skill from the rare green of the emerald.

Again, as the afternoon sun throws its radiance through the transfiguring medium of painted glass, note the effect on altar, chancel and floor. Every detail of the rose window is traced upon the opposite wall, and amber outlines interlace with those of a brighter orange, whose vivid hues are softened by a rich dark brown. The floor is stained with flecks of garnet or drenched by a flood of blue light, which leaves the gazer in doubt as to whether it is a soft azure or a pale apple green.

But who is the painter of these bright colors, fleeting as they are fair? Whence does the sunlight borrow its almost prismatic hues? And for answer we must turn to those beautiful stained, painted or mosaic windows, which light up, with a radiance all their own, the interior of our churches.

To trace the growth of the glass industry would be no easy matter, as it sends its roots far into Egyptian, Assyrian, as well as European soil; still, a few details concerning the beautiful and interesting art of glass-painting may not be devoid of interest. The subject of picture-windows is a large one, since their fabrication brings into play many and diverse faculties. Not a few people labor under the mistake that the words "painted," "stained," and "mosaic," when applied to the

glass of our colored windows, are synonymous terms, but so far from this being the case, it often happens that some of the best effects are produced without either paint or stain. A writer on this subject says explicitly: "In painted glass the colors are produced by enamels fused into the surface of the glass by means of heat. In stained glass a permanent transparent color-effect is secured by the action of heat on certain metallic oxides applied to the surface as pigments; while in mosaic glass, the design is brought out by the use of shaped fragments of colored glass bound together by strips of doubly grooved lead."

As the last-named finds great favor with artists in glass, a few facts regarding its production are in order. It must not be imagined that the artist has only to catch his fine dreams of beauty, when with a little manipulation, they become materialized in this fragile substance. On the contrary, the first step—and the most difficult one, in the making of the picture-window—is to produce that daintily colored material which makes the window itself possible. When we reflect that all except the exposed portion of the figure are wrought out by means of small fragments of glass; that drapery, sky, earth and water are thus produced, some

idea may be gained of the almost infinite variety of shades required.

In the manufacture of this glass the materials are much the same as in ordinary sheet and plate glass: for example, about thirty parts of lime, forty of soda to every hundred parts of sand, all being fused in fire-clay crucibles, in the usual furnace. As regards the coloring matter, its name is legion; let it suffice to name a few of the most important. The lovely shades of violet that so charm the eye are produced by the addition of manganese dioxide to the fused mass; deep blues, indigos and purples, from chromium and copper; gold, giving the well-known warm tint of the ruby.

When the artist desires that more than one color shall appear in the glass he causes sheets differently colored to be mixed together while in the plastic condition and thus even sky effects appear as if put on by the painter's brush. The production of the species called drapery-glass is unique. While the sheet is in the plastic condition it is subjected to a rumpling process until it strongly resembles a piece of crumpled cloth. This, when introduced into the picture window, presents a substance hardly less natural than the real article.

While all this labor must be undertaken for the

body of the window, the soul of it dwells in the mind of the artist, and by him must it be evoked if he would have his beautiful design live in glass. In some quiet moment of inspiration beautiful forms and visions knock at the door of his fancy, where they meet hospitable reception and after many processes, much delicate handling and deftness of touch, they are transformed, one might say, into images of light.

These are the pictures before which we stand in mute admiration, and with good reason, for the artist has so strained and filtered the sunlight that it shapes itself at his bidding into forms of light and beauty. Gazing in happy abstraction upon these fragile creations in glass, in thought we wander to other lands, or better, perhaps, forgetting the feverish affairs of life, are lifted to a serener atmosphere, a purer air, by contemplating those picture-windows whose almost spiritual beauty hangs upon a sunbeam.



## **THE HUMORIST OF SUNNYSIDE**



## THE HUMORIST OF SUNNYSIDE

**O**N this side of the Atlantic to-day, there is no dearth of literary craftsmen. Not so, however, in the morning of the nineteenth century. The literary firmament, since lighted by constellations of varied brilliancy, then boasted but one bright luminary—the genial Washington Irving.

His first attempt in literature took the shape of essays, in which he undertook, good-naturedly, to castigate his native town, these efforts giving promise of his future fame. In this work, Irving's genius was trying its wings and pluming itself for a higher flight, which flight he took when he wrote his "History of New York," that daring burlesque of the annals of New Amsterdam when in its swaddling clothes. The blameless fun and irresistible gaiety of the book captured the hearts of his readers and its success was a foregone conclusion.

But, as if loth to bind himself irrevocably, Irving still played fast and loose with the muse

of literature. A desire for travel sent him a second time to Europe, and various causes combined to keep him there for seventeen years. Though he felt at times an irrepressible longing for his native land, yet he profited by his opportunities for studying men and things, filling his mind with much of the lore that threw a peculiar charm over his writings.

Forced by a happy reverse of fortune to turn again to literature, hitherto cultivated merely for amusement, his genius flowered and bore fruit amid the inspiring scenes of old England. The Sketch Book, with its mingling of plaintive sentiment and sweet humor, quite took the English public by storm, and was the best possible answer to Sidney Smith's contemptuous question, "Who reads an American book?"

The gentle, genial Irving beheld England with a poet's eye. Its storied past appealed to his chivalric soul, and his fancy delighted to people its ivied ruins with forms long dead and dust. Every quaint custom of the days when England was indeed merry, was dear to him. Hence, with what evident pleasure he lingers over the descriptions of Christmas festivities at Bracebridge Hall, or the May-pole dances on the village green.

Having now won a hearing on both sides of the

Atlantic, his pen was seldom permitted to rest. To his admiration for Goldsmith's genius, and to the fact that they were, in many respects, kindred spirits, we owe his fascinating story of that ill-starred poet. Taken from the life it seems to be, with its record of faults and foibles, blunders and large-hearted charities, and yet we love Goldsmith all the more for having read it.

Irving's truant steps ere long led him to Spain, and of his stay in that land of sun we have many memorials. As we read the magic pages of "The Alhambra," we tread with him its marble halls, see the Moorish arches, turrets and domes under the spell of the Andalusian moonlight, and hear the musical splash of Lindaraxa's fountain. There, too, he invested his noble conception of the character of Columbus with the graces of his style, and under the magic of his pen, we seem to see the modest navigator standing unnoticed amid the gilded throng that made up the court of Ferdinand and Isabella.

As the biographer of Washington, he rose to the demands of the subject and we like to think that the blessing he received as a child from the great commander-in-chief of the Revolution was a prophecy of their future relation as hero and biographer.

But it is especially with New York and the Hudson River that his name will be forever linked. He has thrown his spell over the Catskill mountains, over cliff and gorge, gray rocks and shaggy forests that keep watch and ward over the river, until they, in a way, breathe and burn of him. Indeed, to speak of the Hudson suggests the writer whose wizard pen has made its shores classic ground.

Irving's philosophy of life was of the cheery, sunny order; a spirit of toleration was his, a reverence for the great and good; a genuine love of humanity, and these traits are the warp and woof of his written word. While his warmest admirer cannot hope that all his books will weather the storms of time, it seems safe to say that his Sketch Book, "Knickerbocker," and "Goldsmith" will live to delight future generations.

Scattered through his writings are many evidences of his keen religious sensibilities. In one of his letters, wherein he lays bare his heart, he refers to the uplifting influence of the great cathedrals of Europe, and their awakening within him a yearning for something this world could never give. In "St. Mark's Eve," he dwells upon the beauty of the doctrine of Guardian Angels, and elsewhere speaks impressively of the prompt recog-

nition by the Spaniards of the Angelus bell, when "as at a melodious signal, earth is linked to heaven." And again we read of his fondness for the engraving of Ary Schaeffer's *Christus Consolator*, at which he could not gaze without tears.

"A pity 'tis 'tis true" that we as a people are prone to run after new idols, literary and otherwise; yet we only cheat ourselves of what is eminently worth while, if we neglect the writings of the humorist of Sunnyside—name suggestive of its owner's sunny temperament and warm heart.



## THE FIRESIDE BARD



## THE FIRESIDE BARD

**I**F there are poets to fit our every mood, surely Longfellow is preeminently the one to minister to our needs when we are disposed to look upon life as an "empty dream." Open the volume of his poems where you will, you are sure to find verses that speak from the heart to the heart. Bring to the reading of his poems a troubled spirit, a mind ill at ease, and ere long, under the poet's gentle spell, the feeling has fled.

He who relishes only the verse that rings with the blare of trumpets and the clash of arms will not be attracted to this poet of the home and heart. While his lines do not fire our souls to deeds of daring, they do what is of far greater moment—they help us in the small difficulties and annoyances that start up in our daily path.

Nor is fervid passion his theme. Fierce poetic rage, fine frenzy, these are conspicuously absent; but, in their stead, the pathos, the beauty of daily life, of familiar emotions, of nature's varied aspects, inspire his muse to sing with a tenderness and sweetness unsurpassed.

The note of hope, too, sounds through his verses—of pessimism there is not the faintest trace. Without obtruding his griefs upon his readers, he makes us feel that he too has suffered, but without bitterness, and he may be said to have truly lived his own poems, in that he made his sorrows stepping-stones to higher things.

The tender grace of his early literary manner loses nothing of its charm as he acquires firmness of touch, but rather expands into a new loveliness. Elegance, rising often to stateliness, is there, and at times a splendor of diction, showing that he had the riches of our language, like ready ministrants, at his beck and call. But those poems that most thrill the heart are simple, though never insipid. In fact, the simplicity of his style is like the limpid water of a sunlit brook, and through its transparent medium the thought looks out upon us, clear as the moss and pebbles of a crystal stream. No need for men and women to band themselves together, cudgeling their brains in the vain effort to reach the secret of his meaning. It is patent as the beauteous aspect of the sky, the autumnal wealth of color, or the vesper song of the thrush.

And then, the melody of his lines. Their smooth and easy flow—music caught and en-chained by words—from what we know of him,

well typifies the poet's character. He lived his poems, and they in turn reflect his life. Unlike verse, unhappily too common, they bear no trace of having been painfully hammered out in the brain's workshop; they seem rather to well up from their source—the poet's heart.

As the bard of the domestic affections, the moral purity of his verse, in these days of degenerate literature, is like a breath from pine-clad hills to one gasping in the tainted air of disease and death. True, those who cling to the dogma, "art for art's sake," cavil at the moral purpose underlying his poems, and yet Longfellow knew how to play upon the master-chords of the human heart—the infallible test of a true poet.



## **SWALLOW FLIGHTS OF SONG**



## SWALLOW FLIGHTS OF SONG

THE world over, the advent of a true singer to the poetic ranks is sure to give a thrill of delight to sincere lovers of poesy. For this pleasure we are indebted to the Rev. John B. Tabb, whose little volume of poems, published by Cope-land and Day, of Boston, is now before us.

Turning the leaves of this dainty book, the reader is impressed not so much by lofty poetic soaring as by the artist's depth of feeling and closeness of touch with the natural world. Evidently this poet has surprised nature in all her moods, and he interprets her to us in language simple and sweet—language that goes straight to the heart.

He sings the flowers, the stars, the birds and the complaining brooks—in fact, all the natural objects that most appeal to the mind and heart of a poet. Of course these themes are world-old, yet in the hands of each new poet they take on a peculiarly distinctive quality, a new grace. We never weary of them, as we never tire of the stars

that nightly look in at our windows, or of summer, that each year throws over the earth a robe of blossoms.

In much of Father Tabb's verse there is heard that elusive note of not unpleasing sadness, inseparable from true poetry. We would not have it otherwise. The poet is a seer. He looks quite through the veil of things. His heart responds to breathings that make no impression upon natures of a coarser fiber. Small wonder then, that when the sadness of mere earthly beauty presses upon his heart, it overflows in plaintive melody. "The Lonely Mountain" illustrates our thought:

"One bird that ever with the wakening spring  
Was wont to sing,  
I wait through all my woodlands, far and near,  
In vain to hear.

The voice of many waters silent long  
Breaks forth in song;  
Young breezes to the listening leaves outpour  
Their heavenly lore:

A thousand other wingéd warblers sweet,  
Returning, greet  
Their fellows, and rebuild upon my breast  
The wonted nest,

But unto me one fond familiar strain  
Comes not again—  
A breath whose faintest echo, farthest heard,  
A mountain stirred."

As to the quality of the verse. From the first the reader is impressed by the poet's keenly-observant eye. The primrose by the river's brink to him means something more than a mere primrose, and here the bard's dual vision reveals itself. He is fond of interpreting one object in terms of another, and thus a delightful imagery plays over his verse. Just as rain-drops falling upon the surface of a pool dimple its waters, causing the latter to break into the beauty of multitudinous rings.

As regards this play of fancy, perhaps the following will prove our assertion. Of Sappho he says:

"A light upon the headland, flaming far,  
We see thee o'er the widening waves of time,  
Impassioned as a palpitating star."

The water-lily has caught the fancy of most poets. Our author is no exception to the rule and here is a stanza of his gay little lyric:

"Whence, O fragrant form of light,  
Hast thou drifted through the night,  
Swan-like, to a leafy nest,  
On the restless waves at rest?"

Of the wood-robin he says:

“Lo, where the blooming woodland wakes  
From wintry slumbers long,  
Thy heart, a bud of silence, breaks  
To ecstasy of song.”

Perhaps it may argue a lack of poetic sympathy, but we are inclined to think that lines like the following are not so happy:

“Behold, where in silence is drowned  
The last fleeting echo of sound,  
The rain-bow—its blossom—is found.”

Or these:

“To heap with many a harvest dream  
The granary of sleep.”

In “My Orange Grove” we read:

“Orbs of autumnal beauty, breathed to light,  
From blooms of May, . . . .  
The circles of three seasons compassing  
In spheres of gold.”

These to us appear a trifle strained. The glad surprise that comes of apt imagery is missing and the lines lose in force.

But while graceful fancies wearing the garb of poetic diction may satisfy our sense of beauty, it

is quite another matter to touch the heart. Yet this our poet has done. Though he does not wear his heart upon his sleeve, he has, nevertheless, given us poetry which is the outcome of true emotion.

From the poem, "Robin," we quote a stanza which combines pathos and music:

"Come to me, Robin! The far echoes waken  
Cold to my cry;  
Oh! with the swallow-wing, love-overtaken,  
Hence to the Echo-land, homeward to fly!  
Thou art my life, Robin. Oh! love-forsaken,  
How can I die?"

The lines entitled "The Captives," show how much may be said in the compass of two short stanzas. Here is the last:

"Strangers in all but misery  
And music's hope-sustaining tie;  
They lived and loved and died apart,  
But soul to soul and heart to heart."

From "Content" we take these strong lines:

"The door is shut. To each unsheltered Blessing  
Henceforth I say, 'Depart'! What would'st thou of  
me?

Beggared I am of want, this boon possessing,  
That thou dost love me."

In that kind of verse most difficult to write—religious poetry—this author has achieved signal success. He secures this result, in the main, by combining dignity and sincerity of thought with simplicity of word. This is best exemplified in the poems “Christ to the Victim-Tree,” “The Assumption” and “The Recompense,” the last, a lovely setting of the Gospel incident—the breaking of the alabaster box.

A word about the quatrains. Leaving diffuseness to inferior artists who prefer quantity to quality, this poet-priest chooses the reticence and restraint of the four-line stanza. As a result, we have a number of gem-like verse-groups, each presenting the crystallization of a happy thought. Strongly tempted as we are to support this statement by quotation, we forbear.

That the sonnet-lute has not been touched unskilfully by our poet this little book offers delightful evidence. Here is the octave from the sonnet to “Solitude,” which will be appreciated by those who long for quiet to entertain the timorous maiden, Thought:

“Thou wast to me what to the changing year  
Its seasons are,—a joy forever new;  
What to the night its stars, its heavenly dew,  
Its silence; what to dawn its lark-song clear;

To noon, its light—its fleckless atmosphere,  
Where ocean and the over-bending blue.  
In passionate communion, hue for hue,  
As one in Love's circumference appear."

The fine sonnet "Unuttered" voices the poet's sadness at his inability to put in words a dream ever trembling on the verge of speech. He says it is

"Like a star that in the morning glance  
Shrinks as a folding blossom from the sight,  
Nor wakens till upon the western height  
The shadows to their evening towers advance.

So in my soul a dream ineffable,  
Expectant of the sunshine or the shade,  
Hath oft, upon the brink of twilight chill,  
Or at the dawn's pale glimmering portal stayed,  
In tears, that all the quivering eyelids fill,  
In smiles that on the lip of silence fade."

With the keenest appreciation of the beauties of these poems, we realize how inadequately they have been set forth at our hands. We must perforce leave to abler pens the pleasant task of giving honor where it is due. We can but say that the new singer is gifted with no small share of the divine afflatus, and that he is entitled to an honored place among the elect of poesy.



## **A GREAT CATHOLIC POET**



## A GREAT CATHOLIC POET\*

WATCHERS of the poetical firmament were startled not long since by the swimming into their ken of a new star of poesy, which, though shining with a variable brilliancy, literary experts pronounce of the first magnitude. The new poet, Mr. Francis Thompson, in a volume modestly entitled "Poems," now for the first time addresses the whole English-speaking world. The remarkable work revealed by this volume provoked curiosity in regard to the writer, and the public soon learned that the new poet had repeated the experience of most men of genius who have scaled the heights of Parnassus.

His father planned for Francis a medical career; but nature made him a poet; and, in the contest with her, parental authority played a losing game. His passionate devotion to literature cost him a home and a father's favor, and for years, we are

\* This sketch and the one preceding first saw the light of print many years ago—the Thompson article in the pages of the "Ave Maria," where it appeared shortly after the publication of that author's first volume of poems.

told, privation, poverty and suffering were his constant companions. A turn of fortune's wheel, and from want and obscurity he has risen to the poetic ranks; the encouragement and faith in his abilities shown him by a friendly editor figuring in large measure to bring about this happy result.

But has Mr. Thompson presented credentials really entitling him to a place among the elect of poesy? The slender volume which he offers to the public is an invitation to "take and read" and satisfy ourselves as to the justice of his claims. He has been called the nineteenth-century *Cra-shaw*, and with good reason; for even a cursory glance at his work reveals the quaint phrasing, the conceits of style as well as the warmth of expression characteristic of that poet. All this, to one long accustomed to the language and graces of Tennyson, is in marked, and at times not wholly agreeable contrast. The warmest admirer of the new poetic aspirant could not be blind to the defects of his style; they are conspicuous on almost every page.

Prominent among them is his fondness for archaic words, as, for instance, "totty," "cock-shut," and the rest, all plainly used with malice aforethought. Then, too, Mr. Thompson has set up a private mint, where, out of Latin bullion,

he coins words without let or hindrance. This new coinage does not bear the official stamp required to make it pass current in the republic of letters, hence the hue and cry raised by the literary inspectors. Obscurities are present also, resulting from violent ellipses which, joined to a certain mysticism, make it at times difficult to grasp the author's meaning.

But it is more agreeable by far to call attention to the manifold beauties of these poems and their passionate warmth of expression. These are no swallow flights of song, but a bold soaring toward the empyrean of poesy. To be sure, the writer offends seriously at times, but in the next line he makes noble atonement; for then he wraps great thoughts in the splendid drapery of burning words.

The dedication to Wilfrid and Alice Meynell is in the form of a lyric, quaint but musical:

"If the rose in meek duty  
May dedicate humbly  
To her grower the beauty  
Wherewith she is comely;  
If the mine to the miner  
The jewels that pined in it,  
Earth to diviner  
The springs he divined in it;  
To the grapes the wine pitcher  
Their juice that was crushed in it,

Viol to its witcher  
The music lay hushed in it;  
If the lips may pay Gladness  
In laughers she wakened,  
And the heart to its sadness  
Weeping unslakened;  
If the hid and sealed coffer  
Whose having not his is,  
To the losers may proffer  
Their finding—here this is;  
Their lives if all livers  
To the Life of all living,  
To you, O dear givers!  
I give your own giving."

The poems occupying the first part of the volume are addressed to the lady who recognized his genius and befriended him in time of need. For this lady, to whom he looks up as to something little less than a seraph, he sings an admiration as chaste as ice, as pure as snow. The following lines from the poem, "Before Her Picture in Youth," give the keynote to this admiration:

"As lovers banished from their lady's face,  
And hopeless of her grace,  
Fashion a ghostly sweetness in its place,  
Fondly adore  
Some stealth-won cast attire she wore—  
A kerchief or a glove;  
And at the lover's beck

Into the glove there fleets the hand;  
Or at impetuous command  
Up from the kerchief floats the virgin neck:  
So I, in very lowlihead of love—

Too shyly reverencing  
To let one thought's light footfall smooth  
Tread near the living, consecrated thing,—  
Treasure me thy cast youth.

As gale to gale drifts breath  
Of blossoms' death,  
So, dropping down the years from hour to hour,  
This dead youth's scent is wafted me to-day;  
I sit, and from the fragrance dream the flower.

To this the all of love the stars allow me,  
I dedicate and vow me.  
I reach back through the days  
A trothed hand to the dead the last trump shall not  
raise."

In this poem occurs the line:

"From those eternal sorrows of thy pictured eyes,"

which suggests Tennyson's:

"The starlike sorrows of immortal eyes."

In the poem "To a Poet Breaking Silence," admiration, thought and symbolism clothed in well-chosen words, move along the channel of rhyming

couplets with a musical flow, of which the following lines afford a fair example:

“Ah! let the sweet birds of the Lord  
With earth’s waters make accord;  
Teach how the crucifix may be  
Carven from the laurel tree,  
. . . . .  
The Muses’ sacred grove be wet  
With the red dew of Olivet,  
And Sappho lay her burning brows  
In white Cecilia’s lap of snows.”

“*Manus Animam Pinxit*” is a pathetic appeal to the lady who holds dominion over him, to be true and noble; since if she prove less than his ideal, the knowledge would be fatal. A few lines may be quoted:

“Like to a wind-sown sapling grow I from  
The clift, Sweet, of your skyward-jetting soul;  
. . . . .  
But ah! if you, my Summer, should grow waste,  
With grieving skies o’ercast,  
For such migration my poor wing was strong  
But once; it has no power to fare again  
Forth o’er the heads of men.”

“*A Carrier-Song*” is evidently modeled upon Scott’s lyric, beginning:

“Where shall the lover rest  
Whom the fates sever? . . .

But this lyric lacks the minor tones of Sir Walter’s composition, and is gay and bright, with quaint turns of expression. Here is a stanza:

“Whereso your angel is  
My angel goeth,  
I am left guardianless,  
Paradise knoweth!  
I have no Heaven left  
To weep my wrongs to,  
Heaven, when you went from us,  
Went with my songs too.  
Seraphim,  
Her to hymn,  
Might leave their portals,  
And at my feet learn  
The harping of mortals.”

In strange contrast to this, the stanzas, “To the Dead Cardinal of Westminster,” are unusual in meter, subtle in thought, and somber and sad in expression:

“As sap foretastes the spring,  
As earth ere blossoming  
Thrills  
With far daffodils,

And feels her breast turn sweet  
With unconceivéd wheat;  
So doth  
My flesh foreloathe  
The abhorréd spring of Dis."

In "A Corymbus for Autumn" there is a certain *abandon*, an elation of spirit hard to be described. It throbs and glows with poetic feeling, though marred by the omnipresent Latin polysyllables. The poet, seemingly intoxicated with joy, gives his muse free rein, becoming, in consequence, somewhat obscure, with his thronging fancies and splendid imagery. The following extracts seem to me peculiarly beautiful:

"Hearken my chant, 'tis  
As a Bacchante's,  
A grape-spurt, a vine-splash, a tossed tress, flown vaunt  
'tis!  
Suffer my singing,  
Gipsy of seasons, ere thou go winging;  
• • • • • • • • • • •  
Far other saw we, other indeed,  
The crescent moon, in the May-days dead,  
Fly up with its slender white wings spread  
Out of its nest in the sea's waved mead!  
• • • • • • • • • • •  
Day's dying dragon lies drooping his crest,  
Panting red pants into the west;

Or a butterfly sunset clasps its wings  
 With flutter alit on the swinging blossom—  
 The gusty blossom that tosses and swings.  
 Of the sea with its blown and ruffled bosom.

The fine imagery of the following can hardly be surpassed:

“The calm hour strikes on yon golden gong,  
 In tones of floating and mellow light  
 A spreading summons to even-song.

See how there

The cowléd night

Kneels on the eastern sanctuary stair.

What is this feel of incense everywhere?

Clings it round folds of the blanch-amiced clouds,  
 Upwafted by the solemn thurifer,  
 The mighty spirit unknown,  
 That swingeth the slow earth before the embannered  
 Throne?”

The rising moon, our poet tells us, comes:

“In vesture unimagined fair:”

and

“As if she had trodden the stars in press,  
 Till the gold wine spurted over her dress—  
 Till the gold wine gushed out round her feet,  
 Spouted over her stainéd wear,  
 And bubbled in golden froth at her feet.”

In the ode, “The Hound of Heaven,” we see the poet at his best; and his best is, to my thinking,

great. The soul pursued by divine grace is the theme—a theme treated with mingled dignity and pathos, high thought, and—save for a cropping out here and there of his pet defects—an expression, lofty and noble. The ode begins:

“I fled Him down the nights and down the days,  
I fled Him down the arches of the years;  
I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways  
Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears  
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.”

Betrayed by men, the soul turns for consolation to little children; but here, too, it is disappointed:

“I sought no more that after which I strayed,  
In face of man or maid;  
But still within the little children’s eyes  
Seems something, something that replies;  
They at least are for me, surely for me!  
I turned me to them very wistfully,  
But just as their young eyes grew sudden fair  
With dawning answers there,  
Their angel plucked them from me by the hair.”

Seeking to penetrate the mystery of life and death, he says:

“I dimly guess what Time in mists confounds,  
Yet ever and anon a trumpet sounds  
From the hid battlements of eternity;  
Those shaken mists a space unsettle, then

Round the half-glimpséd turrets slowly wash again;  
 But not ere him who summoneth  
     I first have seen, enwound  
 With glooming robes purpureal, cypress-crowned."

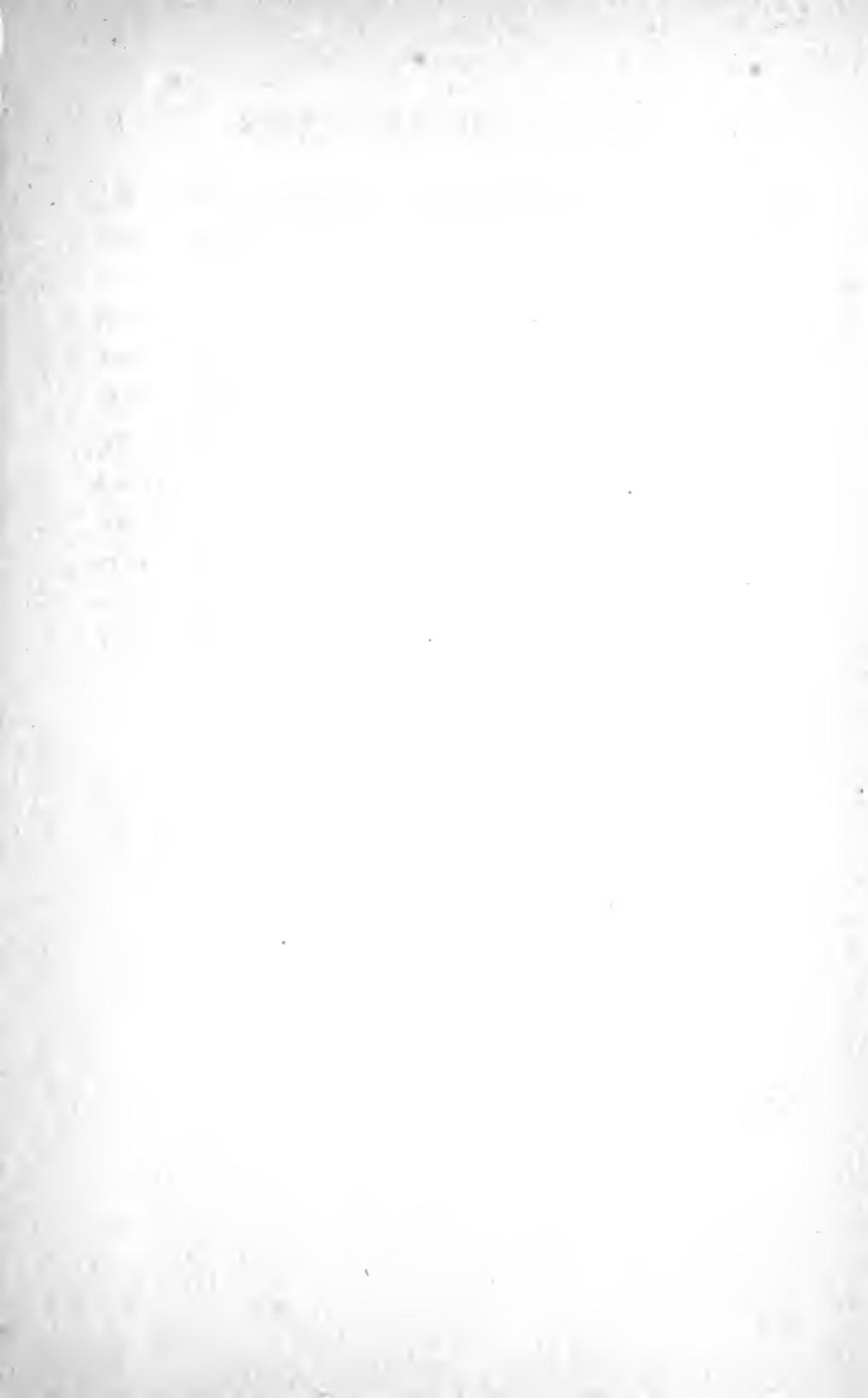
While Mr. Thompson does not obtrude his Catholicity upon his readers, its influence is everywhere felt, and furnishes the theme for his loftiest flights. In the last stanza, the sweetness, pity, and infinite love of God find simple but noble expression:

“ ‘Strange, piteous, futile thing!  
 Wherefore should any set thee love apart?’ ”  
 Seeing none but I makes much of naught, (He said),  
 “ ‘And human love needs human meriting;  
     How hast thou merited—  
 Of all man’s clotted clay the dingiest clot?  
     Alack, thou knowest not  
 How little worthy of any love thou art!  
 Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee,  
     Save Me, save only Me?  
 All which I took from thee I did but take  
     Not for thy harms,  
 But just that thou might’st seek it in My arms.  
     All which thy child’s mistake  
 Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home;  
     Rise, clasp My hand and come!’ ”

As regards the “Poems on Children,” which form the third part of the book, they lack the sim-

plicity one would expect to find in such verse; though even in these there are poetic flashes, like lightning in a summer cloud.

Should the criticisms of the press penetrate to the monastery in Wales, where for a time the poet has taken up his abode, we doubt that they will disturb his mental serenity. He can afford to cultivate calmness, to whom the severest critics concede "fervor, a certain lyrical glow, magnificence, abundant fancy, and a measure of swift imagination." Unquestionably, Francis Thompson has won for himself a niche in the temple of fame.











LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 015 940 873 5